Men-at-Arms

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Belgian Waffen-SS Legions & Brigades, 1941–1944

Wallonie, Wallonien, Flandern & Langemarck

Massimiliano Afiero • Illustrated by Ramiro Bujeiro

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Belgian Waffen-SS Legions & Brigades, 1941–1944

Légion Wallonie, Sturmbrigade Wallonien, Legion Flandern & Sturmbrigade Langemarck

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Series editors: Martin Windrow & Nick Reynolds

BELGIAN WAFFEN-SS LEGIONS & BRIGADES 1941–1944

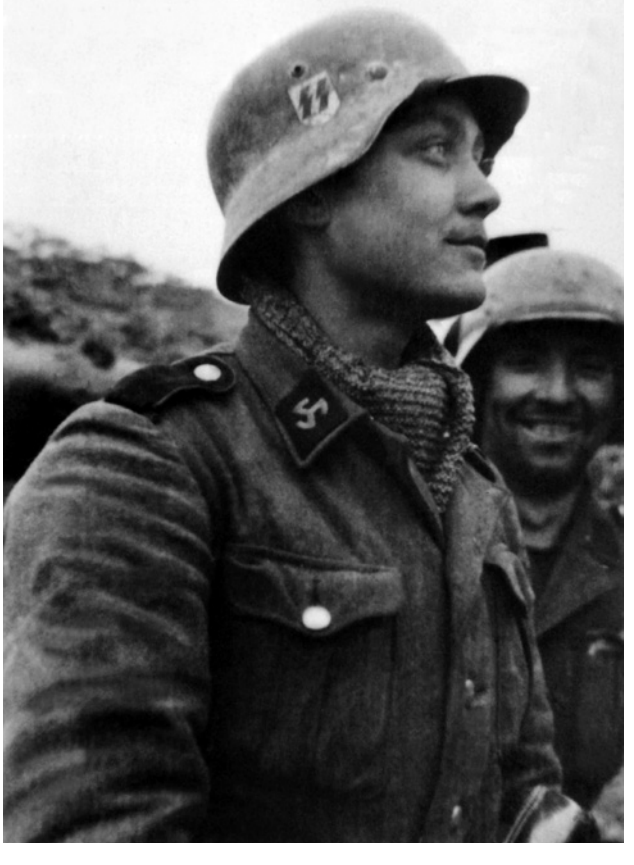
INTRODUCTION

At dawn on 22 June 1941 troops of the Third Reich crossed the borders of the Soviet Union, beginning the largest military invasion in history. As the news spread all over the world, Germany's allies – Italy, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and Croatia – hurried to declare their loyalty in this 'crusade against Bolshevism'. Germany immediately sought to further internationalize the war in the East, organizing recruiting centres throughout occupied Western Europe for so-called Freiwilligen Legionen ('Volunteer Legions'). However, this programme was complicated by the Nazis' racial fantasies.

Historically, Belgium comprises two distinct regions. In the south, Wallonia is largely Roman Catholic and French-speaking; in the north, Flanders is generally Protestant and Flemish-speaking (though there are exceptions in both cases). Since Walloons were then considered by the Nazis to be racially 'non-Germanic', the formation of a Walloon volunteer legion was left to the German Army (Deutsches Heer). Flemings were considered to be 'Germanic', so their legion could be organized from the start by the racially sensitive Waffen-SS. The latter had been accepting individual volunteers from Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands and Flanders for its 'Nordwest' and 'Westland' Regiments since spring 1940, and a branch of the Allgemeine-SS (the black-uniformed political organization) had also been established in Flanders.

In summer 1943, after both the Walloon and Flemish volunteer battalions had proved themselves in battle, the former was then transferred from the Army into the Waffen-SS (largely due to the efforts of its politically influential commanding officer, Léon Degrelle), and each was expanded into a new motorized SS 'assault brigade'. This book covers their history until their partial destruction in summer 1944, after which remnants of both formed the nucleii for two new 'paper' Waffen-SS divisions. (For notes on both those formations, see MAA 420, *The Waffen-SS (4): 24. to 38. Divisions, & Volunteer Legions.)*

Spring 1942, Leningrad front: a soldier of the Frw Legion Flandern, displaying on his field-grey Waffen-SS uniform the unit's 'Trifos' collar patch, inherited in 1941 from the disbanded SS-Standarte 'Nordwest'. (US NARA)



Sketchmap by the author showing basic regional divisions of Belgium.

BELGIAN FASCIST MOVEMENTS

Wallonia

Belgium's divided regions naturally provided fertile ground for the growth of right-wing nationalist political movements in the 1920s–30s. In Wallonia the first of these, founded by Paul Hoornaert in May 1922, was the *Légion Nationale*; this later absorbed smaller groups such as the *Fasceau Belge* and the *Jeunesses Nationales*. In 1929, a Catholic Action group in Leuven/Louvain entrusted a 23-year-old law graduate named Léon Degrelle with the direction of a small publishing house, *Christus Rex* ('Christ the King'), which Degrelle transformed into a vehicle for his fascist beliefs. From 1932 his new magazine, *REX*, enjoyed great success, and on 2 November 1935 Degrelle founded the *Parti Populaire de Rex*, which in 1936 obtained 34 seats in the Senate.

Léon Degrelle addressing a Rexist Party meeting; note the party flag. (Author's collection, from a wartime book)

'Rexism' called for a range of social reforms based on restoring the primacy of the Roman Catholic family, and was hostile to both international high finance and Communism. In the years immediately preceding the outbreak of World War II the party therefore maintained a non-aligned stance, and the German western offensive in May 1940 led to its attempted suppression by the Belgian government. Arrested for alleged subversive activity, Degrelle was handed over to the French, and narrowly escaped execution alongside Joris van Severen, head of the Flemish *Verdinaso* movement (see below).

Degrelle was released following the Franco-German armistice of 22 July 1940, and in the same

month the Rexist party began formation of a new paramilitary branch, the *Formations de Combat,* modelled on the German SA. Some 4,000 strong by the end of 1940, its remit was to protect Rexist leaders and assemblies, and to collaborate with the local police and German authorities in maintaining order; its leader from February 1941 was Fernand Rouleau. On 5 January 1941, a Rexist demonstration in Liège attracted about 5,000 people, and Degrelle explicitly declared his future stance by ending his speech with *'Heil Hitler!'* – which attracted serious German attention to the Rexists for the first time.

Staf de Clerq (centre, bearded), leader of the *Vlaamsch National Verbond,* reviews the *Zwarte Brigade* during a *Dietsche Militie* national rally in Brussels in July 1942; compare with Plate A1. (Author's collection, from a wartime book)

Flanders

At the time of Belgian independence in 1830, the ruling classes in both Wallonia and Flanders were French-speaking, and thereafter pursued a policy of 'Francification' throughout the country. This was to the detriment of Flemish participation in politics, national institutions and the professions, and from 1870 an intellectual movement for Flemish consciousness and advancement began to gain a popular base. Under the German occupation during World War I, Flemish nationalism developed into a vigorous political movement; many collaborated openly with the Germans, and there were calls for Flemish autonomy.

This movement persisted in the interwar years, giving birth in 1933 to Staf de Clerq's *Vlaamsch Nationaal Verbond* ('Flemish National Union', VNV), which achieved modest success in the 1939 elections. With the agenda of unifying Flanders and the Netherlands into a single nation, the VNV created a uniformed militia, the *Dietsche Militie;* comparable to the Nazi SA, this had an elite section called the *Zwarte Brigade* ('Black Brigade'), organized on the model of the SS and directed by Reimond Tollenaere. In parallel, from 1931, the *Verbond van Dietsche Nationaal Solidaristen* ('Union for Germanic National Solidarity', abbreviated as *Verdinaso* or *Dinaso*) was led by Joris van Severen. This group went beyond simple Flemish nationalism in favour of a wider expansionist programme; despite adopting the outward trappings of fascism, *Verdinaso* was thus less compatible with the aims of the German Nazi Party (NSDAP).

After German occupation

When German forces invaded neutral Belgium on 10 May 1940, the Belgian government arrested leaders of all groups suspected of being potential threats to national security – Communists, Rexists, and Flemish nationalists alike. Those arrested were sent to France, and Van Severen was among about 20 who were executed by French troops at Abbeville. Belgium surrendered on 28 May (see MAA 493, *Hitler's Blitzkrieg Enemies 1940*), and the Germans wasted no time before creating the new Regiment 'Westland' of the Waffen-SS. This unit recruited hundreds of Dutch and Flemish volunteers, and would be integrated into the newly forming SS-Division 'Wiking'.

Degrelle, wearing the uniform of an officer in the Rexist *Formations de Combat,* poses with German officers at Brussels rail station on 8 August 1941, when the first contingent of volunteers left for their training camp. (From wartime book *La Légion Wallonie*)

The Flemish nationalists also quickly became active. One VNV leader, René Lagrou, gathered volunteers in Ghent to organize a German Allgemeine-SS branch in Flanders (*Algemeene SS-Vlaanderen,* or *Vlaamsche SS*), and the VNV threw itself into collaboration without limits. Under German pressure for the unification of the various nationalist movements, the *Verdinaso* split into a number of factions; some members joined the VNV or the *Vlaamsche SS*, while others would actually drift towards the fledgeling Resistance movement.

On 3 April 1941, Heinrich Himmler's SS Leadership Main Office (SS-FHA) ordered the creation of the SS Freiwilligen Standarte 'Nordwest', a Waffen-SS regiment of volunteers of 'Germanic' origins: Dutchmen, Flemings, and Danes. After an intense recruiting campaign this regiment, commanded by SS-Standartenführer (Staf, Col) Otto Reich, achieved in August, a strength of about 2,500: 1,400 Dutch, 805 Flemings and 108 Danes. A special right collar patch was created for the regiment, bearing a three-legged 'sun wheel' or 'Trifos' symbol. This would be retained by volunteers even when they were later transferred to the Danish and Flemish SS Legions. In June 1941, a cuff title (Ärmelstreifen) with the word *'Nordwest'* was also authorized.

The volunteers received initial training at Hamburg's Langenhorn camp, and later at Radom in occupied Poland. There the regiment was divided into two contingents: one, primarily Dutch, was transferred to Krakow (see MAA 531, *Dutch Waffen-SS Legion & Brigade 1941-44*), while the Flemish SS-Bataillon 'Flandern' remained at Radom. It was Himmler's initial intention that the 'Nordwest' Regt be employed on security duties in north-west Europe, but the outbreak of war in the East changed his priorities. The influx of Flemish volunteers increased significantly in July 1941 after the beginning of Operation 'Barbarossa' , as did pro-German enthusiasm in Wallonia.

LÉGION WALLONIE

Formation and training

Immediately following the outbreak of war in the East, Hauptmann (Hptm, Capt) Baumann of Kommandostab Z of the Militärverwaltung (German military occupation authority) made contact with Fernand Rouleau, head of the Rexist *Formations de Combat,* to initiate the creation of a Walloon volunteer unit for the Eastern Front. Degrelle himself made the official announcement in Brussels on 6 July 1941; the response was enthusiastic, and within a week more than a thousand volunteers came forward to undergo medical examination. They came from all social classes, including a good number of students. Most were members of the *Formations de Combat,* or of another pro-German nationalist group, *Les Amis du Grand Reich Allemand* (AGRA).

Degrelle himself was one of the first volunteers, and refused a German offer of the rank of Leutnant (Lt, 2nd lieutenant), preferring to start his military career as a private in the ranks. According to order no. 3680/41 of the German High Command, the Walloon Legion was officially

designated as Wallonisches Infanterie-Bataillon Nr. 373. On 8 August, when 860 volunteers left Brussels by rail for a training camp at Meseritz near the German-Polish border, crowds cheered them on their way.

Arriving at Meseritz on 12 August, the volunteers immediately started their basic training, and on the 25th they swore an oath of allegiance to Hitler, specifically 'in the fight against Bolshevism'. Major Georges Jacobs, formerly of the Belgian colonial troops, was placed in command of the Legion, with Oberleutnant (OLt, 1st Lt) Lucien Lippert as his deputy. The Walloons were provided with German Army uniforms, plus, for their left sleeves, a German-made woven arm shield. This showed the Belgian national colours of black, yellow and red in vertical stripes, below *'Wallonie'* lettered in yellow on a black panel.

The 373rd Walloon Infantry Battalion was organized in four companies, three rifle and one machine-gun: 1. Kompanie, Hptm Albert van Damme; 2. Kp, Hptm Willy Heyvaert; 3. Kp, Hptm Georges Tchekhoff; and 4. (MG) Kp, Hauptmann René Dupré. The German Lt Leppin was assigned to the unit as liaison officer. Lèon Degrelle served ostensibly as a simple private in 1. Zug (1st Platoon) of Hptm van Damme's 1. Kompanie, but his political status ensured that he had the ear of the battalion staff.

Hauptmann Georges Tchekhoff, first commander of the Walloon Legion's 3. Kompanie, and, as the senior captain, briefly of the whole battalion in April-June 1942. Of Caucasian origin, Tchekhoff had served in the Imperial Russian Navy before the Bolshevik Revolution, but had been living in Belgium since 1918. He was one of about a dozen men from 'White Russian' emigré families who enlisted in the unit in 1941. (Dernier Carré – Léon Degrelle)

EASTERN FRONT, 1941–42

The Légion Wallonie left Meseritz on 16 October 1941, and arrived in Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine, on 2 November. The advance of the German Army Group South had been checked by the autumn rains that transformed the landscape into an immense quagmire. After a few days' rest, on 6 November the Walloons crossed the Dnieper river, continuing some 30km (18 miles) eastwards towards Novo-Moscova, where they took position and mounted patrols. From mid-November, various elements were temporarily dispersed on security missions behind the Donetz front. On 26 November, in cold and snow, the unit marched via the villages of Petropavloka, Merchevaja and Slavianka, to reach Grichino-Selo on 1 December; during the march the unit suffered its first fatality when Hptm Dupré, commander of 4. Kompanie, stepped on a mine.

On 10 December, the Legion was subordinated to 101. leichte-Infanterie-Division (Gen Erich Marcks) as part of III. Armee-Korps. The terrible weather conditions, inadequate training and lack of winter equipment led to about 50 of the older men being demobilized and repatriated. Placed in reserve, the unit established its winter positions at Tcherbinovka.

By mid-January 1942, cold and sickness had already reduced the battalion's combat strength from some 500 to about 320 legionaries.

Hauptmann Jacobs, judged unfit for command, was replaced with another former Belgian Army officer, Hauptmann Pierre Pauly. The German liaison officer Lt Leppin was also dismissed (at the explicit request of Degrelle), and was replaced with Hauptmann Erich von Lehe. With the exception of Hptm Tchekhoff, all the company commanders also changed: 1. Kp, Lt Alfred Lisein; 2. Kp, Lt Joseph Daulne; 3. Kp, Hptm Georges Tchekhoff; and 4. (MG) Kp, Oberleutnant Arthur Buydts.

Leutnant Degrelle photographed with other Walloon volunteers in a Ukrainian village in spring 1942. His rapid promotion through the NCO ranks, and his officer's commission in May 1942, were obviously due to his political status, but he did also exhibit courageous leadership in action. (US NARA)

The Walloon 373rd Inf Bn was integrated into the battlegroup Kampfgruppe Tröger, alongside I./ SS-Inf Regt 9 'Germania' of the 'Wiking' Division, a Croatian infantry battalion, a reconnaissance company, a tank company, a 10.5cm artillery battalion and a 7.5cm battery. On 26 January 1942 the Legion left Tscherbinovka, arriving by train at the village of Rosa-Luxemburg in early February. On 11 February, for meritorious conduct in the field, Léon Degrelle was promoted to the rank of Gefreiter (lance-corporal/ private first class).

Gromowaja-Balka, February 1942

On 17 February, Kampfgruppe Tröger was transferred to the Stepanovka area to reinforce the positions of Gen Werner Sanne's 100. leichte-Infanterie-Division. The Walloons occupied Gromowaja-Balka some 8km (5 miles) north of the Samara river; this village was located on the banks of a stream at the bottom of a valley. Leutnant Lisein's 1. Kp was placed in defence of the north-western sector, and Hptm Tchekhoff's 3. Kp to the west, with an isolated foothold defended by Ofw Ruelle's platoon 500m further away. With 2. Kp, Lt Daulne defended buildings in the north, and Lt Buydts' 4. Kp was based in the south-east, minus dispersed sections. Soviet artillery soon began to hit the village; the companies were ordered to launch patrols to assess enemy strength and positions, and the combination of shellfire and encounter actions cost the Legion 9 killed and 45 wounded in ten days.

At dawn on 28 February the Red Army finally attacked, with two rifle regiments (i.e. theoretically up to 6,000 infantry), supported by 14 tanks. The 3.7cm anti-tank guns of the Croats and the 8cm mortars of the Walloons soon got the range; in their trenches, the Walloon riflemen and machine-gunners held their fire until the Soviet infantry were only some 50m from their positions, and then cut wide gaps in the advancing masses. They were nevertheless forced back, and close-quarter combat followed inside the village, with houses changing hands several times. Although supported by German artillery and elements from SS-Regt 'Germania', the Walloons were hard pressed. To avoid minefields north of the village, the Soviets launched a turning movement from the west, outflanking 2. / 'Wallonie' and a platoon of the MG company under Oberfeldwebel Bosquion. Leutnant Closset's platoon of 1. / 'Wallonie' also took part in a desperate counterattack.

A Soviet flamethrower tank entered the village, and a new phase of the fighting followed among the blazing houses. At around 8.30am, 1. Kp was attacked from the rear due to the withdrawal of 2., and was itself forced to fall back. Again Hptm Pauly launched counterattacks, only to be driven back into the centre of the village, and at around noon he was forced to move his command post, in immediate danger of being overrun. With three-quarters of Gromowaja-Balka now in enemy hands, Hptm Pauly personally led another counterattack from house to house, and 1. Kompanie managed to regain its positions.

In the afternoon, while the enemy were preparing for a new assault, a squadron of Ju 87 Stuka dive-bombers hit their concentrations on the outskirts, and soon afterwards a few German tanks and some infantry also came up. Yet another counterattack, in which Degrelle distinguished

An MG34 crew of the Legion's 4. Kompanie in action on the Donetz front in spring 1942. The apparent use of a mountain troops' *Bergmütze* cap by the man in the background is unexplained. (Dernier Carré – Léon Degrelle)

himself, finally retook the burnt-out village, and pursued the retreating enemy to take numerous prisoners. At the end of the battle, Hptm Pauly promoted Léon Degrelle to Oberfeldwebel (Ofw, staff sergeant) in the field for his courage in combat. The defence of Gromowaja-Balka had cost the battalion 65 dead and 110 wounded. On the evening of 4 March 1942 the legionaries were directed to the village of Blagodatch, where, on 13 March, Gen Sanne decorated 37 Walloon volunteers with the Iron Cross 2nd Class.

Order of battle, May 1942

Between April and early May the Legion was assigned as a reserve unit for 68. Infanterie-Division. Due to the severe losses and lack of replacements, Hptm Pauly reorganized the companies and promoted some NCOs. Pauly himself was repatriated, officially for health reasons, to be (briefly) replaced on 6 April by Hptm Tchekhoff, the oldest company commander. Although still an NCO, Léon Degrelle was appointed ordnance officer, which allowed him to work closely with the Legion staff; on 1 May he was commissioned Leutnant, and on 21 May he was decorated with the Iron Cross 1st Class. The order of battle was then as follows:

Kommandeur: Hptm Georges Tchekhoff *(until 4 June 1942)*
Adjutant: OLt Lucien Lippert
German liaison officer: Hptm Dietzl
1. Kompanie: Lt Jules Mathieu
2. Kompanie: Lt Georges Ruelle
3. Kompanie: Lt Camille Bosquion
4. (MG) Kompanie: Lt Joseph Daulne
Pionier Zug: Ofw Joseph Mirgain (combat engineers)

The Donetz front, May 1942

With the start of summer, the German High Command resumed the offensives on the Eastern Front. The ambitious objectives assigned to Army Group South were: the annihilation of Soviet forces located between the Donetz basin and the Don; the conquest of the Caucasian passes; and the capture of the rich oilfields on the Caspian Sea coast.

The Walloon Legion was transferred to Gen Rupp's 97. Jäger-Div, initially under 1. Panzer-Armee in what would be redesignated from 9 July as Army Group 'A' . Under Operation 'Edelweiss', this southern grouping of 22 divisions was tasked first with reducing the Soviet bridgehead formed during the winter in the Izjum-Barvenkovo-Slaviansk region, and driving the enemy north-east from the Donetz river. On 6 May the Walloon Legion reached Varvarovka, and elements were sent to take over German positions on a ridge facing the enemy-occupied village of Jablenskaïa, where only a hundred metres separated the German and Red Army minefields and wire. After about ten days of relative calm, the unit received orders to prepare to attack alongside a German infantry company. On the night of 16/ 17 May a force was assembled, led by OLt Lassois and including about 60 Walloons of Ofw Mirgain's pioneer platoon and one of heavy machine guns from 4. Kompanie. This infiltrated the Soviet barbed wire and minefields under cover of darkness, taking up positions in front of the enemy lines.

At 2.30am the codeword 'Donetz' launched a general German attack on the 'Izjum bend'. The force including the Walloon pioneers and machine-gunners managed, with German artillery support, to reach and attack the ruins of Jablenskaïa and Nikolaïevka, taking them in costly close-quarter fighting. On the afternoon of the 17th, in unbearable heat, the Walloon Legion pressed on towards the Donetz, covering some 50km (31 miles) by 19 May, when they reached Prelesnoïe. On 26 May they were at Brachowka. and on 10 June marched north to positions along the river near Burkanovo.

Reinforcements, June 1942

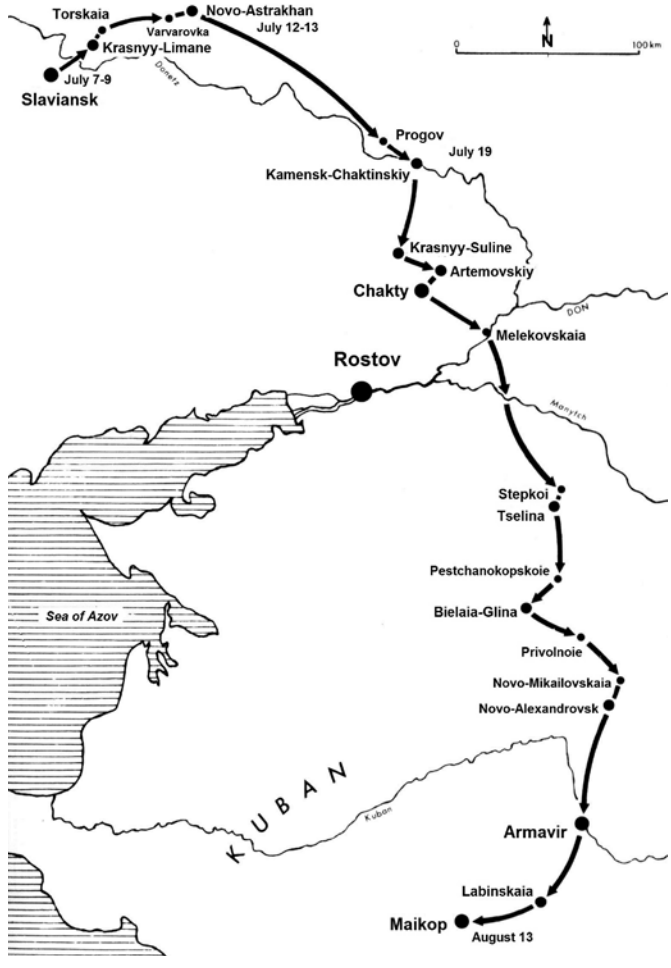
Meanwhile, a major drive to enlist replacements for the Legion had been taking place in Belgium. This managed to recruit 363 new volunteers: 4 officers, 26 NCOs and 333 rankers. In March 1942 about half of them – 150 boys aged between 16 and 18 – came from the Rexist *Jeunesse* youth branch, led by its commander, John Hagemans. To these were added about 200 grown men, including some 60 recovered wounded from the earlier battles. The youngsters brought with them four company flags

Parade at the village of Shurki in late June or early July 1942, marking attachment of the Légion Wallonie to the 97. Jäger-Division. Note at right the company flag – see Plate H2. (Dernier Carré – Léon Degrelle)

designed by Hagemans himself. At the Meseritz training camp the volunteers were divided into the 6. Kompanie (Lt Jean Vermeire) with the teenagers, and the 7. (Lt Henri Thyssen) with those over 20 years old. On 2 June 1942 the train carrying them arrived in Slaviansk, where Lt Degrelle welcomed them with a speech before leading them to Brachowka.

The new volunteers were distributed to bring the companies up to strength, and a PaK (anti-tank) platoon was created, led by Ofw Pierre Dengis and with guns towed by half-tracks. In addition, the unit's logistic 'tail' was reinforced with a platoon of 'Hiwis' – Russian auxiliary volunteers. In total the battalion now had 850 Walloon legionaries and 100 Russian auxilaries. A new commander was also appointed; at Degrelle's recommendation, the 28-year-old OLt Lucien Lippert was chosen, despite his age and modest rank. His senior subordinates in June 1942 were as follows:

Staff, OLt Lassois, Lt Degrelle; medical, OLt Dr Jacquemin, Lt Dr Albert; German liaison officer, Rittmeister von Rabenau; 1. Kp, Lt Mathieu; 2. Kp, Lt Vermeire; 3. Kp, Lt Ruelle; and 4. (MG) Kompanie, Leutnant Bosquion.



The Legion's route of march into the Caucasus region, summer 1942. (Author's map)

Towards the Caucasus

On 26 June 1942 the Walloon Legion marched east from Brachowka for Shurki, a small village north-west of Slaviansk, where it formally came under the control of 97. Jäger-Division. On 7 July the Walloons began their march south for the Caucasus; on the 24th they crossed the Don river at Melekovskaia, and on 4 August reached the Kuban at Armavir. On 13 August, after marching 800km (500 miles) in exhausting heat, the Legion entered Maikop, location of the first Soviet oilfields – which the Red Army had sabotaged before retreating.

On the night of 14/15 August the unit resumed its march. With much territory to cover, the commander of 97.Jäger-Div divided his force into two battlegroups: Jäger-Regt 204 veered south-west towards Tuapse on the Black Sea, while Kampfgruppe Ott, comprising Jäger-Regt 207 and the Walloon Legion, continued south into the Caucasus foothills.

The two forces initially encountered only light resistance, and Kampfgruppe Ott advanced some 150km (93 miles) in three days. The enemy were always watchful for an opportunity, however, and it came when they surrounded the 97. Jäger-Div's command echelon, marching between the two Kampfgruppen, in the village of Schirwanskaja. Sent to the rescue, at dawn on 19 August two Walloon companies successfully attacked the village of Prusskaïa, and then established contact with the units surrounded in Schirwanskaja, forcing the enemy to fall back.

Tjerjakow, August 1942

On 21 August the Walloons resumed their march south, but now themselves divided. While Lt Closset's 2. Kompanie was detached, the other three were ordered to attack the defended village of Tjerjakow, anchored on a rocky spur. A platoon from 1. / 'Wallonie', led by Ofw Foulon, climbed wooded hills on the right to flank the Soviet positions, and their assault was supported by Ofw Kehren's machine guns, Ofw Graff's mortars and Ofw Dengis's AT guns. When they had climbed the rocky slopes the legionaries launched their attack with great dash, and the village fell into their hands in a matter of minutes.

A few hours later the Soviets counterattacked, but their initial attempt on Lt Ruelle's 3. Kp positions in the local collective farm was repelled thanks to heavy-weapons support. Throughout the night the Soviets continued to launch attacks, and the following morning they struck from the forest behind the village, penetrating it at a second attempt. The Walloons suffered heavy losses in close fighting, and only stabilized the situation after they managed to eliminate the enemy's support weapons; the Soviet units then retired into the forest, and made no further attacks on Tjerjakow. In the aftermath, Hptm Lippert was decorated with the 1ron Cross 1st Class, 11 other volunteers with the 2nd Class, and Lt Degrelle received the Infantry Assault Badge.

In the days that followed the Walloons were mainly engaged in maintaining contact with the other German units in the sector, and during one of these patrols Uffz John Hagemans, the leader of the Rexist youth organization, fell in combat. On 28 August a unit from SS-Div 'Wiking' relieved the Legion in Tjerjakow. The next day the bulk of the battalion marched east for Kubano-Armiansk, where Lt Closset's 2. Kompanie was already located.

Hauptmann Lucien Lippert (left) and Lt Degrelle in the Caucasus, probably in August 1942. Degrelle has a small Rexist Party badge pinned above his pocket, and at this date both officers still display the white *Waffenfarbe* of the infantry. (Author's collection, from a wartime leaflet)

The end in the Caucasus, September–October 1942

Throughout September the Walloons' activities were limited to reconnaissance patrols. The beginning of October brought rain and mud, and a German attempt to finally capture besieged Tuapse before winter. On 6 October the Legion followed 97. Jäger-Div out of Kubano-Armiansk, to encounter many difficulties on rough mountain tracks under incessant rain. After a series of inconsequential actions until mid-October, the legionaries took up surveillance positions on ridges surrounding the Pscisc valley, some 20km (12 miles, as the crow flies) short of Tuapse. From 22 October they held a defensive position south of Navajinski, by which time they were suffering badly from ill-health; by the beginning of November the battalion's combat strength was down to just 187 men.

Army Group 'A' had been definitively checked in the Caucasus, and the threatening situation on the Stalingrad front to the north now obliged 1st Panzer and 17th Armies, in danger of being cut off, to retreat to the Kuban and then to the Don. The Walloon Legion was finally withdrawn from the front line, and given three weeks' home leave. (However, a hundred volunteers

from the second contingent, led by Lt Léon Closset, remained with 97. Jäger-Div; after taking part in its rearguard fighting, they were flown out to Crimea in February 1943.)

SS-STURMBRIGADE 'WALLONIEN', 1943–44

The results achieved by all the European volunteer legions with the Army and Waffen-SS had impressed Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler, who saw an opportunity to enlarge his combat forces at the expense of the Army. Degrelle had already attempted without success to have the Legion attached to SS-Div 'Wiking', and when on leave in December 1942 he persuaded senior SS officers to sponsor a renewed recruitment drive. On 1 June 1943, through the direct intercession of SS-Obergruppenführer (Ogruf , Gen) Gottlob Berger, head of the SS-FHA, the reorganized former Walloon Legion was officially incorporated into the Waffen-SS as the SS-Freiwilligen Brigade 'Wallonien', redesignated on 3 July as 5. SS-Sturmbrigade 'Wallonien'. Unusually, although not of 'Germanic' ethnicity in Nazi eyes, Walloon volunteers were given rank titles with the prefix 'SS-' instead of the conventional non-Germanic prefix, 'Waffen-'. The brigade received Waffen-SS uniform, complete with a new armshield of simplified 'French' shape (though many Legion veterans continued to use the old one).

The new 'assault brigade' had a strength of only about 2,000, or roughly the official establishment for a single regiment. It included survivors of the Walloon Legion, other former officers and soldiers of the Belgian Army, and about 400 new volunteers of all social classes, from ex-miners and factory workers to sons of the bourgeoisie and aristocracy. The veteran Lucien Lippert was appointed to command the brigade, with the rank of SS-Sturmbannführer (Stubaf, major). Training was undertaken first at Pieske camp near Meseritz, and later at Wildflecken on the Hesse-Bavarian border. The understrength motorized brigade then consisted of a headquarters, three rifle companies, a heavy weapons (MG and mortar) company, a motorcycle platoon, a pioneer platoon, a transport company, a depot company, and other logistic elements. Training was completed in October 1943.

Officers of the Walloon Legion at Pieske training camp near Meseritz, during a visit by Reichsführer-SS Himmler on 24 May 1943. The unit's transfer to the Waffen-SS would be announced on 1 June, but Army uniform is still worn here. Note that Lt Jean Vermeire (left foreground) displays the Edelweiss right-sleeve patch of the mountsin troops, and Hptm Lucien Lippert (right foreground) their metal cap badge – see under Plate C2 & C3. They and Degrelle (obscured behind Himmler) all wear the *Bergmütze* cap. (Dernier Carré – Léon Degrelle)

Now wearing complete Waffen-SS uniform and insignia, but retaining the old sleeve shield, a Walloon crew of the new brigade's mixed heavy-weapons company man an 8cm mortar on the Dnieper front in late 1943. (US NARA)

The Dnieper front, winter 1943/44

At the beginning of November 1943 the brigade was sent to Army Group South's Dnieper river front in Ukraine, and on 11 November it was subordinated to SS-Gruppenführer (Gruf, LtGen) Herbert Gille's 5. SS-PzGren-Div 'Wiking' north of Cherkassy. The Walloon volunteers de-trained at Korsun, west of Cherkassy, on the night of 19/20 November. Reinforced with a battery of StuG III assault guns from the SS-Polizei-Div under SS-Hauptsturmführer (Hstuf, Capt) Planitzer, on 26 November they were deployed along the Olschanka river, facing to their north-east the Cherkassy forest and that town beyond it, with 2.Kp under SS-Obersturmführer (Ostuf, 1st Lt) Henri Derricks in reserve at Smela.

The wooded, marshy Olschanka sector was teeming with Soviet partisans; on 13 December a patrol led by SS-Ostuf Hubert van Eyser was almost wiped out near Sakaloroskaja, and nine days later Léon Degrelle's 3. Kp saw hard defensive fighting at Yrdin – partisans were now being supported by regular Red Army units. During that month the brigade's front was reduced from 20km to 7km (12 to 4½ miles) between Losowok and Starosselje in recognition of its limited strength. Meanwhile, the Red Army's 1st and 2nd Ukrainian Fronts (army groups) had crossed to the west bank of the Dnieper respectively north and south of Cherkassy, creating a vulnerable German salient.

On 4 January 1944, to ease strong enemy pressure, the brigade launched a successful attack on the village of Sakrewka, and then remained in defence in the Moschny sector until relieved by III./ 'Westland' from the 'Wiking' Division. On 15 January, however, the Walloons suffered no fewer than 200 casualties in a savage battle with a mixed partisan/ regular force in the Teclino forest (after which they reported that numbers of women with shaven heads had fought fiercely among their opponents). During 15-18 January the brigade reported destroying 600 enemy positions; assembled at Beloserje, they were reviewed and decorated by SS-Gruppenführer Gille.

The Korsun Pocket, January–February 1944

On 24 January, Gen Konev's 2nd Ukrainian Front attacked the salient from the south-east and Gen Vatutin's 1st Ukrainian Front from the north-west. By 28 January, some 56,000 German troops of roughly six divisions were encircled in a 'pocket' centred on the town of Korsun; they were designated Gruppe Stemmermann, after the commanding general of XI Armee-Korps. As the only armoured and mobile formation among them, the 'Wiking' Div would play an important role in the battle.

The Walloons found themselves at the eastern end of the pocket. At 8am on 2 February, Red Army formations attacked in strength between Losowok and the Dnieper. Losowok was lost, then retaken by the brigade's 2. Kp with support from 'Wiking' armour, but was finally ordered evacuated. The next day 'Wallonien' regrouped at Beloserje, supposedly to defend a front of some 30km (18 miles) between Starosselje

and Derenkowez – but with only about 300 tired infantrymen. Numerous Soviet penetrations had taken place, but an unseasonal thaw had made roads almost impassable for both sides, and they were clogged by fleeing German transport and thousands of Ukrainian refugees. On 6 February the Soviets attacked again; after furious clashes the Walloons managed to fall back in good order in the late afternoon. Fighting continued for two days, during which the village of Skiti was lost and then recaptured in close-quarter combat.

On 9 February, with the 'pocket' slowly shifting south-west, the Walloon brigade was ordered to provide a rearguard for retreating German units. More than 100 of the brigade's vehicles were destroyed by Soviet tanks during the next two days, while the Walloons fought to hold the Derenkowez position at odds of 10: 1 against. Falling back finally on 11 February, the brigade entrenched at Novo Buda on the 13th. During a Soviet attack the following day SS-Stubaf Lippert was killed, being replaced in command by SS-Hauptsturmführer Degrelle.

On 11 February, a relief effort by Gen Breith's III Panzer-Korps from the south-west had achieved limited success, reaching the Gniloj-Tikitsch river near Lysyanka and creating a small bridgehead on the east bank. On the 16th, the Army Group commander GenFM von Manstein ordered Gen Stemmermann to try to break out south-westwards through the last 7km (4 miles) of Soviet-held territory. At dusk the southern column, formed by the 'Wiking' Div and 'Wallonien' Bde, advanced, with the equally determined 72. Inf-Div on their right flank. Under attack the next morning by Soviet armour and aircraft in difficult terrain, they were obliged to abandon all vehicles and heavy equipment, but by about noon on 17 February the survivors reached the lines held by III. Panzer-Korps. and then the river. Total casualty figures are contradictory in German and Soviet sources, but it seems that roughly 28,000 German troops broke out of the encirclement; 632 of these were the Walloon volunteers, who were then withdrawn from the front.

January 1944: a group of Walloon volunteers take a brief smoking break during the fighting in the Korsun Pocket. By the breakout on 17 February the unit had suffered about two-thirds casualties. All these men wear the July 1943 long-visored 'universal field cap' and no Edelweiss badges are visible. (US NARA)

For the parade by the 'Wallonien' Bde survivors through Brussels in April 1944, they borrowed SdKfz 251 halftracks from the Panzer-Grenadiers of the 12.SS-Pz-Div 'Hitlerjugend', which was undergoing training around Beverloo in Belgium. The noses of the vehicles have Burgundy Cross flags draped or painted on them. (From wartime book *'De Tcherkassy á Bruxelles'*)

Triumphal reception

Both sides extracted as much propaganda value as they could from the battle, and the partial break-out was hailed in Germany and Belgium as a triumph. The courageous fighting by the 'Wallonien' Bde was emphasized; Hitler personally decorated the promoted SS-Stubaf Degrelle with the Knight's Cross, and the Rexist leader addressed large crowds in Paris and Brussels. From Wildflecken camp the brigade's survivors were transferred to Beverloo, which was then a base for the forming 12. SS-Pz-Div 'Hitlerjugend'. To counter Soviet claims that the unit had been annihilated, a parade was organized in Charleroi on 1 April, on which occasion 75 Walloon volunteers were decorated with the Iron Cross, and the unit later made a triumphant parade through the streets of Brussels using vehicles borrowed from 'Hitlerjugend'. Soon sent back to Wildflecken camp, 5. SS-Freiwilligen Sturmbrigade 'Wallonien' was reorganized.

Order of battle, 30 June 1944

Brigade Stab
I. Bataillon (1.-4. Kp)
II. Bataillon (5.-8. Kp)
Infanterie-Geschütz-Kompanie (light howitzer)
Panzerjäger-Kompanie (anti-tank)
leichte Flak-Batterie (light AA)
schwere Flak-Batterie (heavy AA)
Feldersatz-Kompanie (replacement training)
Versorgungs-Kompanie (maintenance)

Despite this 'paper' organization, the brigade in fact had less than the establishment of a regiment: just 53 officers, 232 NCOs and 903 rankers, for a total of 1,188 all ranks. (By comparison, the 4. SS-Frw PzGren-Bde 'Nederland' formed in January 1944 had a total of 9,342, with four infantry battalions in two regiments, an artillery regiment, anti-tank and engineer battalions, and an armoured reconnaissance company – see MAA 531).

The Estonian front: Tartu, August 1944

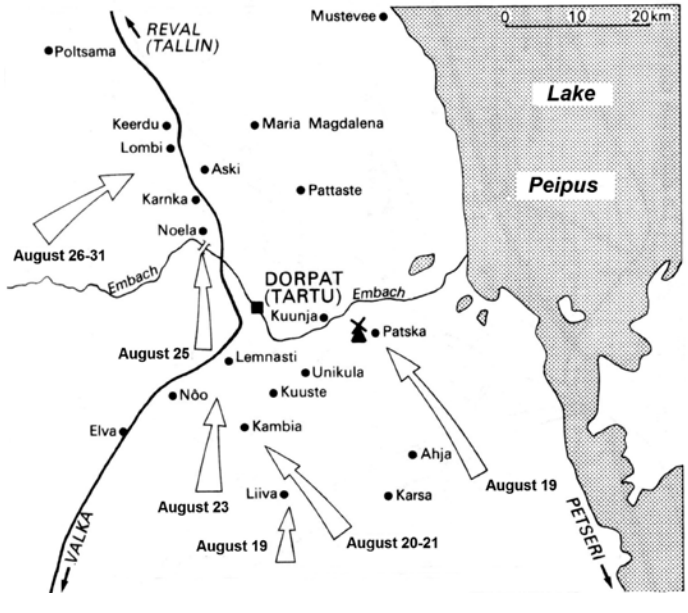
At the end of July 1944, while Degrelle was forbidden (because of his propaganda value) to return to the front line, one of his battalions was

sent, without consulting him, from training at Debica straight to the Estonian front. Degrelle then followed them on his own initiative, and found them deployed on the coast of the Gulf of Finland in the rear of the *Tannenbergstellung* positions (see below, under SS-Freiwilligen Sturmbrigade 'Langemarck'). These were being strenuously defended by elements of SS-Ogruf Felix Steiner's IIISS-Pz-Korps, after being driven back following the epic defence of Narva.

In mid-August, a breakthrough by the Soviet 3rd Baltic Front south of Lake Peipus threatened to hook northwards behind these German forces in northern Estonia, and to help resist this Steiner sent a weak Kampfgruppe south, commanded by SS-Brigadeführer (Brigaf, MajGen) Jürgen Wagner of the SS 'Nederland' Brigade (see MAA 531). 'Kampfgruppe Degrelle' – I. Bataillon and the PzJäg-Kompanie from 'Wallonien', with a total strength of about 500 men – was attached to this force. (Since 1943 the establishment of a German infantry company was only some 80 men, half its previous strength). Degrelle persuaded Wagner to leave them in reserve at first, to give him a few more days to train them. Kampfgruppe Wagner, with elements assembled from the SS 'Nordland' Div and 'Nederland' Bde plus an Estonian battalion and local volunteers, was deployed around the east-west Embach (Emajõgi, Ema) river line, anchored on the central city of Tartu (Dorpat).

On 19 August 1944 the Walloon unit had its first major contact with advancing Soviet forces at the village of Patska and 'Windmill Hill'; supported by four tanks, the Walloons held their ground, but Red Army thrusts routed other German and Estonian units. On 21 and 22 August the Walloons defended Kambia from repeated Soviet attacks, but on the 23rd the loss of Nôo to their north-west left Kambia and the road north to Tartu under immediate threat. SS-Untersturmfiihrer (Ustuf, 2nd Lt) Léon Gillis established an anti-tank barrier on this road, repelling enemy assaults and inflicting heavy casualties.

On 24 August, despite support from Maj Hans-Ulrich Rudel's Stuka tank-busters of SG 2, Degrelle was forced to pull back north-westwards. On 25 August the fighting reached Tartu, and for several days thereafter the Walloons were engaged in defending first Noëla, about 20km (12 miles) north-west of the city, and then Lombi and Keerdu. Fierce fighting saw every available man – clerks, storemen, drivers and 'walking wounded' – committed, and this scratch unit was mentioned three times in the official bulletins of IIISS-Panzer-Korps. On 30 August, Degrelle's men held on under repeated attacks, but at terrible cost: of 260 Walloon volunteers present that morning, only 32 were still standing at nightfall.



Area of operations of the reinforced I./ 'Wallonien' as part of Kampfgruppe Wagner in southern Estonia, August 1944; white arrows indicate successive thrusts by elements of the Soviet 67th Army. The Walloons managed to withdraw to Noela before 282nd Rifle Div and 16 Tank Bde advancing from Nôo took the strategic Karevere bridge. Tartu itself fell to three Red Army divisions on 25 August. (Author's map)

Aftermath

The shreds of the destroyed battalion were withdrawn from the front; all the survivors were decorated with the Iron

Excellent studio portrait of SS-Sturmann Remi Bogaert of 4. Kompanie, SS-Frw Legion Flandern, from a wartime magazine. Clearly visible are the insignia on the M1940 *'Fliegermütze'*-style field cap; the SS-runes and rank collar patches; the buttonhole ribbon of the Winter 1941/42 Medal; the rank chevron below the SS sleeve eagle; the Flanders shield on the forearm; and the Legion's cuff title. (Author's collection)

Cross, while Léon Degrelle added the Oakleaves to his Knight's Cross. On 20 September 1944 the SS-FHA announced the raising of a new 28. SS-Freiwilligen Grenadier-Division 'Wallonien'. The survivors, and II. Btl from Debica, were to form the armature for unemployed sailors and airmen, and for raw recruits from among the mass of refugees who had fled the Allied liberation of Belgium that summer. This shadow of a division was of only uneven value during the defensive fighting in Pomerania and on the Oder front in 1945.

SS-FREIWILLIGEN LEGION FLANDERN

With the start of Operation 'Barbarossa', by early July 1941 Flemish nationalists had already begun forming a volunteer unit for the Eastern Front. This was at first named in German 'Verband Flandern', then 'Landesverband Flandern', then 'Bataillon Flandern', and finally 'Freiwilligen Legion Flandern'. At first it coexisted with SS-Regt 'Nordwest', which at the end of August still had some 800 Flemings in its ranks. The regiment was finally disbanded on 24 September, and its Danish, Dutch and Flemish volunteers were distributed to their respective national legions. The three Flemish companies were then grouped with an additional heavy-weapons company and a reserve company. The commander was SS-Obersturmbannführer (Ostubaf, LtCol) Michael Lippert, who is not to be confused with the Belgian Lucien Lippert of 'Wallonie'. (A German World War I veteran, Michael Lippert had taken part in the killings of SA leaders on 30 June 1934 as an officer in Theodor Eicke's Totenkopfverbände.)

Insignia were established as a right-collar patch bearing the former 'Nordwest' Regt's Trifos'; a black-edged yellow left-sleeve shield showing the black Flemish lion rampant; and a cuff title at first inscribed *'Legioen Vlaanderen'* in Flemish, but subsequently changed to the German *'Frw. Legion Flandern'*. More than 1,200 volunteers applied at recruiting offices, but after stringent German medical examinations only 405 of them were accepted.

Formation and training

In early August 1941 the recruits were sent to the Debica training camp in Poland, where they joined the contingent from 'Nordwest'; training was supervised by that regiment's former colonel, SS-Standartenführer Otto Reich. Suitable trainees were sent to various specialist schools: some to the pioneer (combat engineer) school in Breslau, others to the signals school in Nuremberg, and the entire 4. Kompanie to Hamburg for heavy-weapons instruction. During August several hundred new volunteers arrived, among them some leading nationalist personalities: Reimond Tollenaere, head of the VNV militia's *Zwarte Brigade*; Jef Francois of the Flemish Militant Order; Paul Suys of Rex-Flanders, the Flemish branch of Degrelle's movement; and René Lagrou, commander of the Germanic SS (Allgemeine SS) in Flanders. Along with officers of the Belgian Army, these were all appointed second-lieutenants. During this period the Legion was still directly subordinate to the SS-FHA.

On 3 September the Flemish volunteers were transferred to Arys camp in East Prussia for the last phase of their training. There, another 150

volunteers arrived from the 13. & 14. Kp of the disbanded 'Nordwest' Regt; these now formed a 5th (Anti-Tank) Company of the Legion. On 24 September the SS-FHA officially designated the unit as SS-Freiwilligen Legion Flandern, so the Flemish volunteers were authorized to wear the SS-runes right-collar insignia, but many former members of 'Nordwest' chose to retain the 'Trifos'.

The Legion was organized as a reinforced infantry battalion with five motorized companies (3x 'rifle', and one each 'heavy' and 'anti-tank') with a total strength of 1,112 all ranks: 25 officers (of whom 14 were Flemish), 78 NCOs (of whom only 1 was Flemish), and 1,009 rankers (including 935 Flemish). On 13 October 1941 the Flemish volunteers swore an oath of allegiance to Adolf Hitler, but only 'in the fight against Bolshevism'.

Order of battle, October 1941

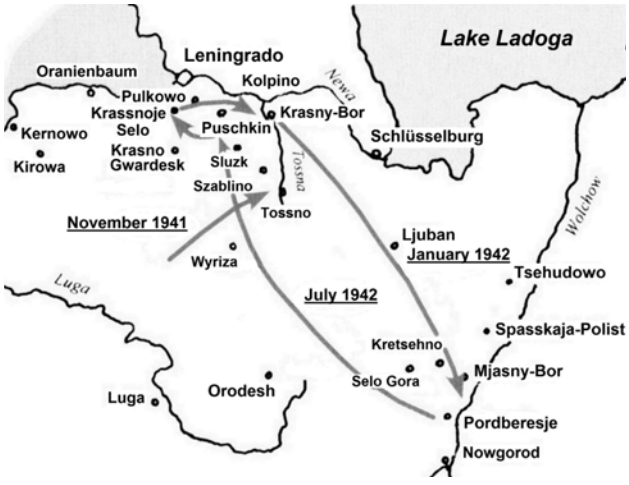
Kommandeur: SS-Ostubaf Michael Lippert
Adjutant: SS-Ustuf Günther Steffen
Stabs-Kompanie: SS-Ustuf Steffen (103 men)
1. Schützen-Kompanie: SS-Ostuf Peter Nussbaum (220)
2. Schützen-Kompanie: SS-Ustuf Helmut Breymann (218)
3. Schützen-Kompanie: SS-Ustuf Hans Moyen (219)
4. (schwere)-Kompanie: SS-Ustuf Karl Neuhäuser (223)
5. (PaK)-Kompanie: SS-Ustuf Karl Weingärtner (159)

The three rifle companies each had three rifle platoons, and a heavy-weapons platoon with a section each of MGs and 5cm light mortars. The 4th 'Heavy' Co consisted of three platoons each of four MG34s with mounts for sustained firing, and an 8cm mortar platoon. The 5th Anti-Tank Co had two PaK platoons each with 3x 3.7cm AT guns, plus, again, one 8cm mortar platoon. On 27 October the unit was declared ready for employment at the front.

EASTERN FRONT, 1941–43

On 6 November 1941 the Flemish Legion received orders for transport to Army Group North's Leningrad front, where it would be subordinated to the motorized 2. SS-Infanterie-Brigade commanded by SS-Brigaf

While the rifle companies of a battalion were all initially equipped with nine MG34s in the light role as the squad automatic weapon, the 4. Kompanie had three platoons each with four MG34s (later, MG42s) with recoil-absorbing *Lafette 34* tripod mounts and 1.5x optical sights, allowing sustained fire on fixed lines. (US NARA)



The operational areas of SS-Frw Legion Flandern on the Volkhov (Wolchow) and Leningrad fronts during winter 1941/42 and the first half of 1942. (Author's map)

Gottfried Klingemann. Partisans roamed behind the front lines, and this brigade had been deployed for security duties before joining the mobile reserve of XXVIII Armee-Korps during the crisis of the first Russian winter. Its other components were then two battalions of the former 'Totenkopf' SS-Inf-Regt 4; Himmler's bodyguard unit, the SS-Begleit-Bataillon 'RF-SS'; the SS-Flak-Abteilung 'Ost', and some minor elements. On 17 November the Legion's staff reported to brigade HQ at Chudovo (Tschudowo) behind the Volhov river front, which faced to the east between Lake Ladoga in the north, and Novgorod (Nowgorod) just above Lake Ilmen in the south. The 1. & 2. Kompanie occupied Andrijanowo, 3. Kp a nearby hamlet, while 4. & 5. Kp and the Legion staff were billeted in Tarasowa. In these positions the Flemish volunteers suffered severely from the almost polar weather.

On 24 November a Flemish battlegroup, consisting of a platoon from each of the companies and commanded by SS-Ostuf Peter Nussbaum, first saw combat. The Kompanie Nussbaum took up front-line positions at Pogostije, Maluksa, Bawatski and Olumno, being placed under command of the SS-Begleit-Bataillon. Although behind the front line, the Flemings found themselves fighting both partisans and Red Army patrols.

On 3 December, Nussbaum was relieved by another Kampfgruppe commanded by SS-Ustuf Breymann, including most of 2. and part of 3./ 'Flandern'. That day a patrol led by *SS*-Ustuf Hans Moyen was ambushed by partisans in dense forest and almost completely wiped out: at least six Flemish volunteers were killed, and another three seriously wounded.

The next day several Soviet patrols attacked a column of Wehrmacht vehicles west of Olomno. Parts of the SS-Begleit-Btl and a company from 'Flandern' reacted, pushing the enemy back and inflicting heavy losses, for only three Flemish wounded.

On 6 December, the 2. SS-Inf-Bde (mot.) handed over its sector to the Spanish volunteers of 250. Inf-Div (the *Division Azul*, 'Blue Division'). The brigade, including 'Flandern', was then transferred far to the west to winter quarters in Latvia, thus missing the opening of the Red Army's surprise winter counteroffensive on the Volhov front from 7 January 1942. On 20 December the Flemish volunteers began to arrive in the area of Ape just beyond the Estonian/ Latvian border, and until the end of the month were located in and around Sabile and Kandava.

Koptsy, January 1942

In the face of Soviet advances across the Volkhov river, both by Soviet 54th Army around Kurishi, and by 52nd and 2nd Shock Armies 100km (60 miles) further south between Chudovo and Novgorod, the German 18. Armee was scrambling for reinforcements. On 3 January1942 the Legion was ordered to form a Kampfgruppe for imminent action. Commanded by SS-Ustuf Breymann, this consisted of 2. & 4. / 'Flandern', totalling 343 all ranks with 40 trucks. The battlegroup assembled at Sabile on 9 January, and was attached to the SS-Begleit-Bataillon. Driving

via Torma in Estonia, after crossing the Narva river they reached the Podbjerjezhje (Pordberesje) sector just north of Novgorod on 17 January. The 4./ 'Flandern' took up positions a few hundred metres from Podbjerjezhye, flanking units of the hard-pressed Spanish 'Blue Division'. On 18 January, Kampfgruppe Breymann received orders to prepare for an attack the following day, to retake from advancing Soviet units the village of Koptsy and sections of main road and railway line that passed through that sector.

Breymann's plan committed the three rifle platoons of his 2./ 'Flandern' to a frontal attack through the snow, supported by the heavy weapons of SS-Ustuf de Wilde's 4. Zug (platoon) of the company. At dawn on the 19th German artillery opened fire; the Flemish volunteers attacked, but were checked by heavy enemy fire until Breymann personally intervened to get his legionaries moving again. The 1. Zug opened the way into the outskirts with grenades, and in close fighting forced the Soviet defenders back toward the centre of the village. Meanwhile, a German Army unit seized the main road north of Koptsy, cutting off the enemy's retreat, and the Flemish volunteers later eliminated the last pockets of resistance. At dawn on 20 January a Soviet bombardment heralded a strong counterattack; enemy troops once more forced their way into the centre of Koptsy, only to be driven out again in hand-to-hand combat.

In the following days the Flemings worked to consolidate their captured positions; the now SS-Ostuf Breymann set up his command post close to that of 4. / 'Flandern' in Zapolye on the eastern bank of the Volkhov, and the two Flemish companies found themselves defending a 3-mile front that ran from the western edge of Koptsy to Nowaya Bystritsa. (The front was naturally not continuous, but made up of separated dug-in positions sited for mutual support.) On 22 January, while making an inspection tour with SS-Ustuf de Wilde, SS-Ustuf Reimond Tollenaere was killed by an exploding shell. The leader of the *Zwarte Brigade* would be commemorated in Flanders by a badge struck in his honour, which would be awarded to all VNV members who fought in Russia during the winter of 1941/42 (see Plate E4).

Flemish volunteers during a rare moment of rest in the swampy, overgrown terrain of the Volkhov front in spring 1942. (US NARA)

With Gruppe Debes

On 30 January 1942, at Podbjerjezhje, most of the remaining elements of the Legion arrived from Latvia. The 'Legion Flandern', SS-Flak-Abt 'Ost' and SS-Begleit-Btl 'RF-SS' joined Gruppe Debes, a temporary tactical force commanded by SS-Oberführer (Oberf, BrigGen) Lothar Debes. On 1 February, SS-Ostubaf Lippert reported to Debes at Lyublyady to receive his orders: the Flemish Legion was subordinated to Inf-Regt 424 of the Army's 126. Inf-Div, and 2. & 4. Kp subsequently passed under control of its Infanterie-Regiment 422. General Laux's 126. Inf-Div and Gen Jaschke's 20. Mot-Div of XXXVIII Armee-Korps were the main formations facing the southern flank of a deep but narrow salient driven by the Soviet 2nd Shock Army more than 40km (25 miles) north-west from the Volkhov river between Novgorod and Chudovo.

The Legion saw heavy fighting in defensive positions between Koptsy, Zwemtitsy, Zapolje, Andrjuchinowo, Twutitsy and Krutik; its command post was set up at Andrjuchinowo, along with most of 3. Kompanie. On 4 February, the 2. / & 4. / 'Flandern' were pulled back to Podbjerjezhje for a short period of rest after sustaining heavy casualties, and on 10 February the unit was cited in the Wehrmacht Bulletin. On 14 February the last company arrived from Latvia: SS-Ostuf Nussbaum's 1. / 'Flandern', with a strength of 2 officers, 13 NCOs and 117 rankers, which was assigned a defensive position between the villages of Bolshoye and Zamozhye. At the same time, 2. / & 3. / 'Flandern' were transferred to the Zyemptitsy sector, about 2 miles north-west of Koptsy.

Between 13 January and 19 February 1942, the 126. Inf-Div and its attached units repulsed 109 enemy attacks, launched by 28 regiments from about a dozen different Red Army rifle divisions. Luckily for the Germans, the Soviet formations in this forested region had been given little armour, and those inside the salient suffered from slow resupply of artillery ammunition.

Zyemptitsy, March 1942

After this month of defensive fighting, 'Flandern' was committed to a series of attacks which almost destroyed it. Beginning on 2 March, two assault groups were formed for an attempt to halt and eliminate a Soviet penetration along the Vyeshki-Zyemptitsy road. The first, commanded by SS-Ostuf Nussbaum, consisted of his 1. Kp, and the second of 3. Kp under SS-Ustuf Kurt Eckenbrecher, each of them with attached heavy weapons from 4. Kompanie. The AT guns of 5. Kp were positioned behind the two assault groups, while the remainder of 4./ 'Flandern' was held in reserve.

After preparatory shelling the Flemings advanced, but minefields halted them under fire. More troops reinforced them under SS-Ustuf Weingärtner, while a machine-gun platoon attached to Nussbaum's group managed to get forward to provide support fire. Both assault groups then made some progress and captured several enemy forward positions, but this first day cost the Legion 100-plus casualties; SS-Ostuf Nussbaum was among those killed, and SS-Ustuf Weingärtner was seriously wounded.

The attack was resumed on the following day: on 3 March, SS-Ustuf Wieweger led the assault by what remained of 1. / & 3. / 'Flandern' and a heavy MG platoon. The understrength 2. Kompanie was also committed, forming an assault group under SS-Oberscharführer (Oscha, S/Sgt) Rüter; this was the first to advance, capturing four enemy bunkers in hand-to-hand fighting. SS-Untersturmführer Wieweger co-ordinated his attack with that of a flanking Spanish battalion (II/ Inf-Regt 269, under Maj Román), and Flemings and Spaniards attacked side by side. However, after advancing about 300m Wieweger's men were pinned down by machine-gun and mortar fire, and as night fell they dug foxholes in the snow for some concealment during a wretched night. On the morning of 4 March the Flemings launched a new attack which eliminated more enemy forward positions, for the loss SS-Ustuf Kamiel de Wilde and 19 others killed or wounded.

Volkhov front, spring 1942: the MG34 gunner of a Flemish rifle squad rests his barrel on the shoulder of his No.2, who steadies it by holding the bipod. (US NARA).

After a few days' pause, the Flemings once again attacked Soviet positions in Zyemptitsy from north and south, this time with preparatory support from Stukas. Fighting their way into the Red Army trenches, the legionaries finally completed the recapture of the village. However, by 8 March the Flemish Legion had been reduced to an effective combat strength of 108 men, and was withdrawn into XXXVIII Armee-Korps reserve at Chichulino, near Novgorod.

An 8cm mortar crew of either 4./ or 5./ 'Flandern' dug in near Puschkin on the Leningrad front, summer 1942. Each mortar platoon had six tubes. (US NARA)

The Volkhov salient, March–June 1942

On 17 March , after a few days' rest, the remnant of the Legion returned to the front, this time assigned to Gen Altrichter's 58. Inf-Div in the Krutik sector. This was west of Myasnoy Bor, on the southern edge of the 'stalk' of the mushroom-shaped enemy salient. Although an early spring thaw slowed all movement in the deep mud, the salient's base was partly cut through, and for two weeks the Krutik sector was regularly ploughed by enemy artillery. On 2 April the Soviets launched new attacks to keep their supply routes open, penetrating the Flemish positions. The Legion's commander SS-Ostubaf Michael Lippert was seriously wounded, and was temporarily replaced by SS-Hstuf Gerhard Hallmann, senior staff officer of the 2. SS-Inf-Brigade. A week later his Kampfgruppe Hallmann was subordinated to SS-Kampfgruppe Burk, commanded by SS-Ostubaf Karl Burk. On 18 April SS-Ostubaf Josef Fitzthum, formerly of the brigade's I./ SS-Inf-Regt 4, took over command of 'Flandern', which was then in the Dolgowo sector.

From 22 April the Flemish Legion would be involved in 18. Armee's operations to cut off and encircle the 2nd Shock Army's salient. Its defenders were ordered to evacuate only on 21 May, and few units escaped. On 31 May, XXXVIII Armee-Korps from the south (including 58. Inf-Div) met I Armee-Korps' thrust from the north. Hard fighting continued until the end of June, but the encircled 2nd Shock Army was annihilated; some 32,000 prisoners were taken, and its commander, Gen Andrei A. Vlasov, was himself captured on 12 July. [1]

The Flemish Legion's conduct earned it an official mention in the Wehrmacht Bulletin of 28 June, signed by 18. Armee's commander General Lindemann. Two days earlier SS-Ostubaf Fitzthum had been transferred, and the Legion was again under the temporary command of SS-Hstuf Hallmann when, on 5 July, Gen Lindemann visited the unit and presented decorations (including the Legion's first Iron Cross 1st Class, to SS-Schütze Jules Guerts, for single-handedly destroying an enemy bunker).

The Leningrad front, July–December 1942

During July the Legion was sent to Osjewa to be re-equipped, and on 14 July its command passed to SS-Hstuf Konrad Schellong, from the

1 For Vlasov's subsequent career after changing sides, see MAA 503, *Hitler's Russian & Cossack Allies 1941-45.*

Flemish Legion volunteers in a defensive position on the Leningrad front, summer 1942. Under magnification, one can be seen to wear the *'Trifos'* collar patch. (US NARA)

SS-Gebirgs-Div 'Nord' and more recently from the Dutch SS-Frw Legion 'Niederlande'. Only days later the unit was recalled to the front, this time to the north-facing line about 10km (6 miles) south of besieged Leningrad, in the Puschkin-Aleksandrowka-Kuzminka sector. 'Flandern' was once more assigned to the 2. SS-Inf-Brigade (mot.), whose character had now changed. No longer a basically ex-'Totenkopf' security formation, it now assembled the Norwegian, Dutch and Flemish SS legions, plus Latvian volunteer battalions. On 1 August, 150 Flemish replacements arrived, many of them former casualties returned from hospital. On 7-8 August, 2. / 'Flandern' successfully defended its positions against attacks.

Around the middle of August, 5. / 'Flandern' occupied Aleksandrowka on the left; 3. Kp was deployed along the Puschkin-Leningrad road, with heavy machine guns from 4. Kp and the weapons platoon from 2. Kp; 1. Kp took up positions outside Puschkin on the right, with an AT gun from 5. Kp and MGs from 4. Kp; and the rifle platoons of 2. / 'Flandern' remained in reserve. Sporadic fire-fights culminated on 18 August in an attack by Soviet tanks, which was repelled with support from Stukas, and an attempt on 3. Kompanie's positions on 21/22 August was also beaten off. However, the unit suffered losses in defensive fighting during the 'first battle of Lake Ladoga' from 27 August to 3 September. Beginning on 6 September, the Spanish 250. Inf-Div was transferred to the right flank of the positions held by the Flemish Legion below the Neva (Newa) river; on the left of 'Flandern' was the Norwegian Legion, with the Dutch Legion beyond them.

Several quiet weeks followed, and on 1 October 1942 the arrival of 230 new volunteers commanded by SS-Ustuf Jan Delbaere restored the battalion to an acceptable strength. The arrival of winter also luckily brought new winter clothing and equipment, since at the beginning of November the temperature dropped dramatically. On 28/29 November a strong Soviet thrust penetrated the German lines near the Legion's sector, but the Flemish were successful in furious defensive fighting. When the Soviets retreated SS-Ustuf Weingärtner, commander of

(continued on page 33)

POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS

1: Banleider, VNV Zwarte Brigade, 1942
2: Wachtmeester, Germaansche-SS in Vlaanderen, 1942
3: Légionnaire, Jeunesse Légionnaire, 1943

WALLOON VOLUNTEERS, 1941-43

1: Volunteer, Rexist *Formations de Combat,* 1943

2: Unteroffizier, Légion Wallonie, 1941

3: Schütze Degrelle, Wallonisches Inf-Btl 373, 1941

WALLONISCHES INF-BTL 373/ *LÉGION WALLONIE*
1: Schütze; Gromowaja-Balka, Feb 1942
2 & 3: Hptm Lucien Lippert, & Schütze; Caucasus, autumn 1942?

STURMBRIGADE & DIVISION 'WALLONIEN', 1944-45

1: SS-Pz-Jäg, 5. SS-StrmBde 'Wallonien'; Ukraine, Jan 1944

2: SS-Ustuf Gillis, 28. SS-Frw Gren-Div 'Wallonien'; Stargard, Jan-Feb 1945

3: SS-Uscha, 28. SS-Frw Gren-Div 'Wallonien'; Strebelow, early 1945

FLEMISH VOLUNTEERS, 1942

1: NCO, SS-Frw Legion Flandern; Volkhov front, June 1942
2: Flemish nurse, DRK; Leningrad front, Aug 1942
3: SS-Uscha, SS-Frw Legion Flandern; Leningrad front, Aug 1942

STURMBRIGADE & DIVISION 'LANGEMARCK', 1944-45
1: SS-Ustuf, 6. SS-StrmBde 'Langemarck'; Jampol, Feb 1944
2: SS-Gren, 6. StrmBde 'Langemarck'; Staro-Konstantinov. March 1944
3: SS-Strm, 27. SS-Frw Gren-Div 'Langemarck'; Pyritz, Feb 1945
4: Barracks sign, 1944

PERSONALITIES

1: SS-Stubaf Konrad Schellong; Bohemia, May 1944

2: SS-Stubaf Léon Degrelle; Estonia, Aug 1944

3. SS-Uscha Remy Schrijnen; Pomerania, Sept 1944

FLAGS & INSIGNIA
See commentary text for details.

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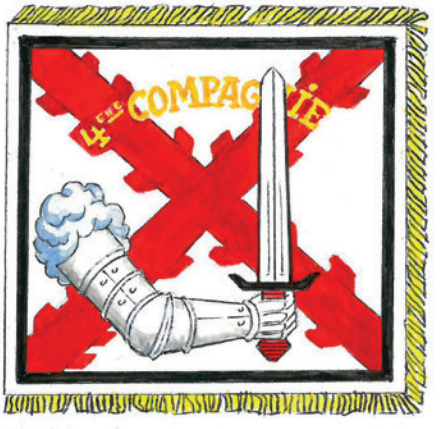

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4./ 'Flandern', led a counterattack that left about 100 Soviet dead on the field, and earned Weingärtner an Iron Cross 1st Class. Throughout December the Flemish companies continued to hold positions in the Kolpino sector. On 31 December 1942 the Legion numbered 685 men, with company commanders as follows: 1. Kp, SS-Ostuf Harder; 2. Kp, SS-Ustuf Mahrenholz; 3.Kp, SS-Ustuf Vogel; 4. Kp, SS-Ustuf Weingärtner; and 5. Kompanie, SS-Hauptsturmführer Dethier.

Krasny Bor, March 1943

Between 12 and 18 January 1943, the Red Army's Operation 'Spark' created a corridor from the east along the southern shore of Lake Ladoga and into the Leningrad perimeter. On 5 February, all elements of the Flemish Legion except for 5. (PaK) Kompanie were pulled west to the base area at Krassnoje Selo as part of the 2. SS-Inf-Bde reserve, while 5./ 'Flandern' was detached and assigned to the SS-Polizei-Division.

Beginning on 10 February, the Soviet Operation 'Polar Star' opened the 'second battle of Lake Ladoga', as the 55th Army attempted to smash south-westwards from the Kolpino area through German L Armee-Korps deployed south of Leningrad, planning to meet a north-westwards pincer around Tossno. After a massive bombardment, the 5,600-strong Spanish 'Blue Division', then holding positions around Krasny Bor east of Puschkin, was hit by three-plus Soviet divisions. At the cost of about 70 per cent casualties, the division's three-day resistance slowed the Soviet advance and bought time (see MAA 103, *Germany's Spanish Volunteers 1941-45*).

At the beginning of March, subordinated to 254. Inf-Div, the Flemish Legion was engaged in defensive fighting, first in front of the villages of Nikolskoje and Badejew and then south of Krasny Bor itself. On 19 March the Legion successfully drove off a Soviet penetration between positions held by elements of the 254th in several hours of close-quarter fighting. On 20 March, the Flemish volunteers were re-equipped at Nikolskoje for an attempt to restore the line between Kolpino and Krasny Bor.

At first light on 22 March, after preparatory artillery fire, the advance was spearheaded by 2./ 'Flandern' (SS-Ustuf Kurt Tupuschies). They were forced to go to ground by heavy blocking fire, including from *'Katyuscha'* multiple rocket launchers, before the appearance of German tanks eventually allowed them to reach the Soviet front-line trenches. The Soviets, taken by surprise and perhaps overestimating the strength of their attackers, pulled back. The Flemish battalion was heavily counterattacked in its captured positions the following day, by two infantry regiments and a tank brigade. Although supported by an 8.8cm battery, Flemish infantrymen were obliged to attack the enemy armour using hand-held magnetic AT grenades. The T-34s that got through began to destroy the Flemish positions one by one, until the appearance of several Tiger tanks from sPzAbt 502 forced a Soviet withdrawal. Of the 450 Flemish volunteers who had been thrown into battle on 22 March, only about 50 were still fit to fight, and the unit was withdrawn on 30 March 1943.

The Pyrrhic victory at Krasny Bor was praised in a special Army Corps order of the day, and in Berlin, Himmler began to consider creating a new and larger Flemish formation. The survivors of the Flemish Legion were transferred first to Debica, and then to Milovitz (Milovice) near Prague, to be reorganized.

SS-Sturmbannführer Konrad Schellong, photographed during the reorganization of his mauled 'Langemarck' Brigade in Czechoslovakia, May 1944. Note the 'Trifos' right collar patch, sleeve shield and cuff title, and see under Plate G1 for further details. A concentration camp guard in 1934-36, in 1941 Schellong transferred to SS-Inf-Regt 6 in SS-KGr (later SS-Div) 'Nord', subsequently commanding III./ SS-Frw Legion Niederlande before his appointment to command the SS-Frw Legion Flandern in July 1942. (From wartime book *'Der Leider'*)

SS-FREIWILLIGEN STURMBRIGADE 'LANGEMARCK'

In May 1943 the SS-FHA ordered the raising of a new SS Volunteer Assault Brigade 'Langemarck'. This honour-title (previously bestowed briefly on a unit in the SS-Div 'Das Reich') had nothing to do with any Flemish historical feat: it commemorated a village in western Flanders whose ruins saw bitter fighting during the British/ German Passchendaele campaign of autumn 1917 ('Third Ypres'). About 1,700 men were available, including the veterans of the Legion, new volunteers from Flanders, a few Finnish volunteers, and Flemish veterans transferred from the ranks of the SS 'Das Reich' and 'Wiking' divisions.

Training and organization

The bulk of the training was carried out at Milovitz, but engineers were instructed at Pikowitz (Picovice), most NCOs at the SS-Unteroffizierschule at Lauenburg, and officers at the SS -Junkerschule academy at Bad Tölz. The new formation would be commanded by the promoted SS-Sturmbannführer (Stubaf, Maj) Schellong. Volunteers continued to report throughout July 1943, with the final contingent of 300 arriving from Ghent on 27 July. By the autumn of 1943 total strength had reached 2,022 all ranks: 40 officers, 203 NCOs and 1,779 rankers. As was by now conventional, about 140 Russian 'Hiwi' volunteers would also be enlisted in the brigade's support unit.

While the new Flemish formation was about the same size as the Walloon brigade when initially formed, its organization differed. While the basic components were again two battalions, the first of these was a 'grenadier' battalion with 1st-3rd rifle companies and a 4th 'heavy' company with machine guns and mortars, but the second 'heavy' battalion grouped companies with infantry howitzers, anti-tank guns, armoured tracked assault guns, and light and heavy anti-aircraft guns, plus an extra infantry 'marching' company. The brigade was completely motorized; the infantry companies received a more generous allocation of vehicles than formerly, and each was issued 18 x MG34 machine guns in the light role (twice the original allocation, so two per rifle squad).

Order of battle, July 1943

Brigadestab:
Kommandeur: SS-Stubaf Konrad Schellong
Adjutant: SS-Ustuf Wilhelm Teichert
Stabs-Kompanie: SS-Ustuf Rudolf Six
Grenadier-Bataillon (mot.):
1. Inf-Kompanie: SS-Ostuf Kurt Mahrenholz
2. Inf-Kp: SS-Ustuf Sven Martenson
3. Inf-Kp: SS-Ustuf Vogel
4. MG-Kp: SS-Ustuf van der Weën

schweres-Bataillon (mot.):
5. Inf-Geschütz-Kp: SS-Ustuf Willi Köhn (? 6x 7.5cm le.FH, ? 2x 10.5cm s.FH)
6. Pz-Jäger-Kp: SS-Hstuf August Knorr (9x 7.5cm PaK 40)
7. Sturmgeschütz-Kp: SS-Hstuf Weingärtner (11x StuG III Ausf G)

8. (leichte) Flak-Kp: SS-Ustuf Ortair Uyttersprot (12x 2cm)
9. (schwere) Flak-Kp: SS-Hstuf Willi Dethier (9x 8.8cm)
10. Marsch-Kp: SS-Ustuf Wilhelm Schaumann

On 22 October 1943, following the renumbering of all Waffen-SS units, the brigade was officially designated the 6. SS-Freiwilligen Sturmbrigade 'Langemark' . A cuff title lettered *'Langemarck'* was authorized; the Trifos 'three-legged swastika' was adopted as the official right-collar insignia; and a new version of the Flemish lion arm shield was manufactured (though not universally adopted by veterans).

The Ukrainian front; Zhitomir, January 1944

Training was completed early in December 1943, and on the 26th orders arrived for the brigade's transfer to the Eastern Front, where a Soviet offensive west of the Dnieper river in Ukraine posed a serious threat to Army Group South. As part of this, Gen Konev's 2nd Ukrainian Front attacked south-westwards on a front roughly between Kiev and Cherkassy, aiming to trap 8. Armee further to the south. The German line was penetrated in many places, and the city of Zhitomir was among those recaptured. 'Langemarck' was assigned to XIII Armee-Korps' 4. Panzer-Armee, commanded by General-Oberst Erhard Raus.

Arriving at Tschudnoff (now Chudniv) south-west of Zhitomir on 31 December, SS-Stubaf Schellong reported to Army Corps headquarters, and when his brigade arrived it was ordered to establish defensive positions north of Chudniv. Schellong deployed 'Langemarck' in the area of Dryglov (Dryhliv), adjacent to units from 1. SS-Pz-Div 'Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler' ('LSSAH').

In 6. PzJäg-Kompanie, the No.1 gunner of SS-Uscha Dahlhoff's No. 9 gun in 3. Zug was SS-Sturmann (Strm, Sen. Pte/ Pfc) Remi Schrijnen. The senior gunner ('Richtschütze') assisted the crew chief in selecting targets and ammunition, and was ready to replace him if he became a casualty. It was now that Schrijnen, a 22-year-old veteran of 5. /'Legion Flandern', developed his own technique for positioning his PaK 40, described as a 'Kopfstellung' ('head position'). Depending on terrain, guns were normally deployed in low, revetted positions, but Schrijnen preferred to place his piece in a elevated position for a better view of the battlefield. His platoon of 6./ 'Langemarck' were deployed along a road in support of 2. Kompanie at Dryglov when, on the evening of 2 January 1944, that company was attacked by Soviet tanks. Schrijnen's gun was concealed in the snow immediately in front of them; as soon as they were in range, without waiting for orders, he opened rapid fire and knocked out three of them, causing the others to retreat. A few hours later Soviet tanks attacked the nearby sector held by 2. SS-Pz-Div's Kampfgruppe 'Das Reich', which was successfully supported by the assault guns of 7./ 'Langemarck'. That same day the brigade was transferred 3km south-west, to the area around Dubichye and Liutyi.

At dawn on 3 January, Soviet artillery began to pound the whole defensive front; when it lifted, an infantry attack broke through on the boundary

Veterans of the Frw Legion Flandern and new recruits parade together at a formation ceremony for the Assault Brigade 'Langemarck'. (US NARA)

Motorcyclists of the 'Langemarck' Brigade –- probably of the Stabs Kompanie (HQ Company) –- entering a Ukrainian village, January 1944. They still wear M1940 field caps, and the grey, fur-lined parka and over-trousers first issued to Waffen-SS units in winter 1942/43. (US NARA)

between 'Langemarck' and KGr 'Das Reich'. Schellong ordered an immediate counterattack led by 3. Zug of *2.* Kp (SS-Ostuf Godfried d'Helft), supported by SS-Ustuf Friedrich Ritzau's platoon of StuG III assault guns. The attack was a success, but losses were heavy on both sides, and included SS-Obersturmführer d'Helft. Under continuing pressure, Schellong ordered another counterattack, led successfully by SS-Ostuf Mahrenholz of 1./ 'Langemarck'. That day both SS-Hstuf Weingärtne*r,* the commander of 7. Sturmgeschütz-Kp, and his replacement, SS-Ustuf Ritzau, were killed within a few hours of one another.

On 4 January 1944 'Langemarck' was ordered to take up positions in the northern part of Chudniv. They were shelled as soon as they arrived, and on the night of 4/5 January they had to repel an infantry attack. During the night of 5th/6th the brigade was once again on the march southward, towards Burkovzie on the west-east L'ubar (Lyubar)-Berditchev road. There they made contact with elements of the SS-Ersatz und Ausbildungs Bataillon 'Ost', a replacement training unit which had been tranferred to the front ostensibly for anti-partisan duties. On 7 January a Soviet attack achieved a dangerous penetration between the positions of 'Langemarck' and SS-Ers u. Ausb-Btl 'Ost*'*, but this was closed off in close-quarter fighting by 3. Zug of 2. Kompanie.

The Soviets then shifted their efforts to the sector east of Burkovzie held by Kampfgruppe Lammerding of 2. SS-Pz-Div 'Das Reich', penetrating Burkovzie and pushing further west. On 8 January, after a heavy Soviet artillery barrage, 'Langemarck', the SS-Ers u. Ausb-Btl 'Ost' and 'Das Reich' units were forced to pull back behind the Nosivka river, into a new defensive line that ran from Stetkovzie to Zherenivka; the Flemish brigade was assigned to defend the latter village. On 11 January 'Langmarck' received its first examples of the '*Panzerfaust'* hand-held anti-tank rocket-launcher.

Also on the 11th, the armoured assets of 'LSSAH', 'Das Reich' and 'Langemarck' were assembled west of Berditchev around the core of Kampfgruppe Peiper from 'LSSAH', which included armour, infantry, artillery and engineer units. On 12 January a patrol led by SS-Ustuf Deems of 3./ 'Langemarck' managed to locate the assembly area of the Soviet armoured units in the sector (which earned Deems the Iron Cross 1st Class). On 15 January the SS armour counterattacked north of Krasnopol, in coordination with units of 7. Panzer-Division.[2] Further south, a combat group of 340. Inf-Div reached the Molotchky-Lyubar road at Kyryvka; 'Langemarck' saw heavy fighting while maintaining contact with 'Das Reich' to the north and 340. Inf-Div to the south. The brigade's 3. Kompanie was temporarily assigned to Kampfgruppe Peiper at Stetkovzie, where it remained until 17 January.

In early February 1944 a new contingent of Flemish volunteers reached the brigade, along with new German NCOs from Lauenburg.

2 Incidentally, it was on 13 January that SS-Rttf Balthasar 'Bobby' Woll, gunner of SS-Ostuf Michael Wittmann's Tiger – one of only five then operational in KGr Peiper – was awarded his Knight's Cross, for accumulated destruction of 80 enemy AFVs and 107 AT guns since January 1943. This tank's crew was thus unique in including two holders of the Ritterkreuz.

On 19 February 'Langemarck' handed over its positions at Zherenivka and Stetkovzie to Army units, and moved to join elements of 'Das Reich' and 'LSSAH' at Sepetovka. After a difficult march south-west from that village, under constant threat of partisan ambushes, 'Langemarck' was headquartered near units of 'Das Reich' at Bilhorodka, where another contingent of replacements reached it.

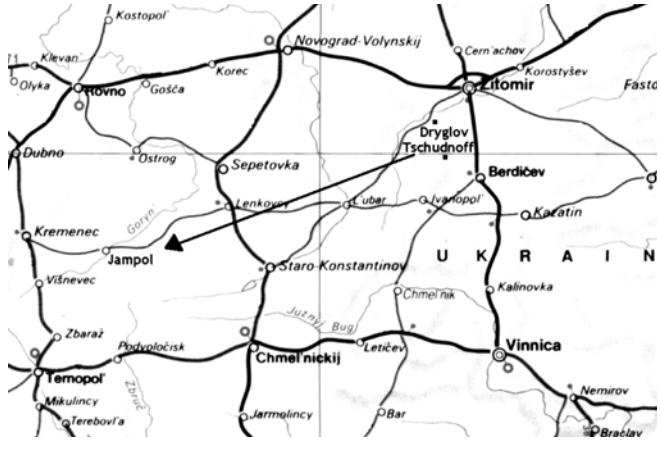
On 24 February, 3. Kompanie launched an attack against the strongly-held village of Mychniv; one assault group was led by the company commander, SS-Ustuf Kahrl, and the other by SS-Ustuf Demeester. The attack was swift, and most of the houses in Mychniv were taken under fire by two assault guns from 7. Kompanie; within a few hours the position was occupied, but SS-Ustuf Kahrl was killed. Demeester took command of the company, but he himself would fall only four days later, to be replaced in turn by the newly arrived SS-Hstuf Wilhelm Rehmann. On 25-26 February further attacks captured the villages of Dvirets, Bilchyntsi and Pokaschka. On 28 February a surprise Soviet attack on the brigade headquarters at Bilhorodka was driven off by 1. & 2. Kompanie and assault guns.

Retreat from Jampol, March 1944

Meanwhile, Soviet forces had made a serious breach 16km (10 miles) further to the north, so a general retreat was ordered on 28 February to a line running east from Jampol on the Goryn river, and 'Langemarck' was ordered to defend that town. To its north and west was either empty space or the Red Army; to the east was part of Kampfgruppe 'Das Reich', while Kampfgruppe Peiper of the 'LSSAH' was fully 55km (35 miles) further south. Early on 2 March, Soviet artillery began to shell the Flemish positions, and observation posts radioed reports of strong enemy armoured forces advancing, but Corps HQ could not give any assurance of assistance. While SS-Stubaf Schellong placed his anti-tank and assault guns to defend the bridges over the Goryn river, it was clear that the isolated brigade had to pull out of Jampol as soon as possible.

The only escape route was east along the road to Bildhorodka, still held by the brigade's Flak companies, then south-east towards Staro-Kostantinov, where the headquarters of LIX Armee-Korps was then located. Withdrawal began at 8am on 2 March; the 6. Pz-Jäg-Kp (SS-Hstuf Knorr) and the few assault guns would form a rearguard, and in the event some armour from 'Das Reich' was also detached to help them.

By the afternoon of 3 March, the column had travelled some 35km (22 miles) east and was approaching Bildhorodka, when a Luftwaffe bombing raid on that town made clear that it had fallen into Soviet hands. Schellong ordered his units to bypass the town and get back on to the main road beyond it, and the attempt began at dawn on 4 March, led by the few tanks and assault guns of 'Das Reich'. This manoeuvre meant crossing open terrain, and a large number of Soviet tanks began to threaten the flanks of the German-Flemish column. The few



Operational area of the 'Langemarck' Brigade south-west of Kiev (off this map, top right) in January – March 1944. Few of the villages mentioned in the text are indicated, and spellings are inconsistent. Krasnopol, site of the Waffen-SS Panzer counterattack in January, was low centre, a few miles south-east of L'ubar (Lyubar). Bilhorodka, briefly occupied by the 'Langemarck' AA companies on 1–3 March, was on the road just north of the black arrowhead pointing at Jampol. (Author's collection)

The brigade's counterattacks were often supported by assault-gun platoons from its 7. Kompanie, equipped with the Sturmgeshütz III Ausf G. (US NARA)

remaining AFVs deployed to meet them, while the Flemish infantry took possesion of the village of Kresenky in a furious battle. The armoured protection was short-lived, however, and as the tanks and assault guns fired away their last rounds the Soviet T-34s became unstoppable.

Schellong then ordered a new retreat across country directly towards Staro-Kostantinov, more than 70km (43 miles) to the south-east. After about 30km it was decided to split the column into smaller elements the better to evade the enemy. On 8 March, after fighting their way through, the first 'Langemarck' survivors began to arrive at Staro-Kostantinov; on the same day SS-Stubaf Schellong was wounded in the hand and evacuated, command passing temporarily to SS-Hstuf Willi Dethier of 9. Kompanie. The last Flemish volunteers arrived on 11 March; only about one-third of the brigade had escaped.

The Flak at Bilhorodka

Meanwhile, a separate battle had been fought by the brigade's detached anti-aircraft gunners at Bilhorodka, which had been occupied on 1 March by 8./ & 9. / ' Langemarck'. SS-Hauptsturmführer Willi Dethier assumed command of the whole position, while 8. Kompanie's SS-Ustuf Otto took control of the defence outside the town, handing over his company to SS-Untersturmführer Issel.

The town immediately came under attack from the north-east, and several Soviet elements quickly penetrated its weak defences. Since the heavy AA guns were of little use in street-fighting, most of the crews fought as infantry, and managed to drive the Soviets back in bitter close-quarter combat. On 2 March the Flak companies evacuated Bilhorodka, but a failure of communications prevented a warning reaching the rest of the brigade, then pulling out of Jampol eastwards. During the confused retreat from Bilhorodka to Staro-Kostantinov elements of 8./ & 9./ 'Langemarck' joined up with German units, including Kampfgruppe 'Das Reich' . With a few of their men, SS-Hstuf Dethier and SS-Ustuf Otto defended a key crossroads 10km (6 miles) north of Staro-Kostantinov, where their stand enabled other units to avoid capture.

Front view of one of 7. Kompanie's 'StuG 40s' – StuG IIIs mounting the long 7.5cm StuK 40 L/48 gun, effective in both anti-tank and infantry support roles. (US NARA)

Dethier and his men helped to defend Staro-Kostantinov until the rest of the 'Langemarck' survivors arrived on 8-11 March. The remnant of the Sturmbrigade then moved to the outskirts of Proskurov, where, on the 14th, an order finally reached them to prepare for withdrawal to Poland for reorganization. Even then they had not fired their last shots in Ukraine: during their journey, on 23 March at Chernivtsi in Bukovina, the survivors of 8. & 9. Kompanie helped to repel a Soviet tank attack.

Since January 1944 , about three months of combat had reduced 'Langemarck' from some 2,000 to about 400 all ranks. The officer corps had been particularly hard hit. The brigade

staff had suffered two officers killed and three wounded; 1./, 2./ & 3. / 'Langemarck' had lost all their officers either killed, wounded or missing, and 7. Kompanie had lost three commanders in succession. In all, 16 officers had been killed – 8 Flemish and 8 German.

After travelling via Romania and Hungary, during April the survivors spent two weeks of rest at Jaslo in eastern Poland before arriving, on 3 May 1944, at a training camp at Knoviz in Bohemia. Here the brigade was rebuilt, re-equipped and reorganized, with the survivors providing cadres for reconstituted companies. Konrad Schellong was decorated with the German Cross in Gold, which had been gazetted on 29 March, and at the beginning of June was promoted to the rank of lieutenant-colonel (*SS*-Obersturmbannführer, Ostubaf*)*. By the end of June effective strength was recorded as 47 officers, 262 NCOs and 1,442 rankers, for a total of 1,751. Military chaplains were provided, and religious observances authorized.

Reorganized order of battle, 30 June 1944

Kommandeur: SS-Ostubaf Schellong
I. Bataillon: SS-Hstuf Rehmann
Adjutant: SS-Ustuf van Leemputten
1. Kp: SS-Ustuf Swinnen
2. Kp: SS-Ustuf van Moll
3. Kp: SS-Ustuf D'Haese
4. (schwere)-Kp: SS-Ustuf van Ossel
5. (Pak)-Kp: SS-Ustuf Laperre
II.Bataillon: SS-Hstuf Oehms
Adjutant: SS-Ostuf Plabst
6. Kp: SS-Ustuf Schaumann
7. Kp: SS-Ustuf Tops
8. Kp: SS-Ustuf Demees
9. (schwere)-Kp: SS-Ostuf Delbaere
10. (PaK)-Kp: SS-Ustuf Kotlowsky
11. (le. FH) Batterie: SS-Ostuf Hinrichs
12. (StuG) Bttr: SS-Hstuf Sprenger
13. (le. Flak) Bttr: SS-Ustuf Otto
14. (s. Flak) Bttr: SS-Ostuf Gustavsson

SS-Stubaf Schellong (right) confers with two of the brigade's officers, early 1944. They wear (left) the long, grey, fur-lined 1942 parka; and (centre), the shorter reversible parka of the 1943 *Wintertarnanzug* padded camouflage uniform, here 'snow-side out'. (US NARA)

The Estonian front: the *Tannenbergstellung*, July–August 1944

On 12 July 1944 the SS-FHA ordered SS-Ostubaf Schellong to quickly organize a single battalion for transfer to the front line in northern Estonia, as reinforcement for SS-Ogruf Felix Steiner's IIISS-Panzer-Korps. This 'Germanic' corps (which included, among other formations, the Scandinavian 11. SS-Frw PzGren-Div 'Nordland' and Dutch 4. SS-Frw PzGren Bde 'Nederland') had held out for five months in the beleaguered Narva bridgehead, but was now pulling back westwards to a new defensive line designated the *Tannenbergstellung*. Schellong decided to send his I. Bataillon

led by SS-Hstuf Wilhelm Rehmann; an Army veteran of the 1939 Polish campaign who was commissioned in the Waffen-SS in April 1941, Rehmann had later commanded a Panzer-Grenadier company in 10. SS-Pz.Div. 'Frundsberg'. Though slightly reinforced, his battalion group still totalled only about 450 all ranks.

Kommandeur: SS-Hstuf Rehmann
Adjutant: SS-Ustuf van Leemputten
Arzt (medical officer): Lt Dr Hertgens
1. Kp: SS-Ustuf Swinnen
2. Kp: SS-Ustuf van Moll
3. Kp: SS-Ustuf D'Haese
4. (s.)-Kp: SS-Ustuf van Ossel (*including* PaK Zug, SS-Ustuf Laperre)

The battlegroup began the long journey to the Eastonian front on 19 July. Arriving at Toila, the location of III. SS-Pz-Korps HQ, I./ 'Langemarck' was inspected by SS-Gruf Steiner in person. Among the changes ordered were the distribution of 4. Kompanie's MGs and mortars between the three rifle companies, and the transfer of its SS-Ustuf van Ossel and his company command group to an Estonian SS company that had lost all its officers.

The *Tannenbergstellung* was located east of the town of Silmäe on the southern coast of the Gulf of Finland, and extended southwards perhaps 3km (2 miles) from the seashore across flat terrain, crossed east-west by the main highway and rail line from Narva back to Riga, capital of Latvia. Extending east to west in the centre, between the road and railway, were the three 'Blue Hills', forming a rough sideways T-shape with the front line. The forward, easternmost feature was Orphanage Hill, the central height Grenadier Hill, and the rear, westernmost was named 69.9 or Love Hill. Dutch SS units held frontline positions between the hills and the coast to the north, and companies from the 'Nordland' Div's SS-PzGren Regts 24 'Danmark' and 23 'Norge' held a line south of them, linking up inland with the Army's 11. Infanterie-Division. Grenadier and Love Hills were then occupied by elements from the Estonian 20. Waffen-Gren Div der SS, plus a scratch Dutch SS/ Kreigsmarine infantry company. [3]

On 25 July the Flemish battlegroup deployed on Orphanage Hill, in a roughly 600m front facing the forest to the east. The command bunker was on the eastern slope, but the medical aid post was well to the rear on Love Hill among Dutch and Danish command posts. In the line, 3./ 'Langemarck' was on the left (north), 2. Kompanie in the centre and 1. Kompanie on the right (south). The anti-tank guns were emplaced to support the infantry companies.

They had only been in position for 24 hours when the Soviet onslaught by 2nd Shock Army opened on 26 July with a massive

One of the 2cm Flak 38 cannon of the brigade's 8. Kompanie in the ground-firing role, March 1944. When the two anti-aircraft companies were detached at Bilhorodka, these were more effective in street-fighting than the 8.8cm guns of 9. Kompanie, whose crews mostly fought as infantry. (US NARA)

3 For sketchmap, see MAA 531, *Dutch Waffen-SS Legion & Brigade 1941-44*, p.24.

bombardment, which proved particularly devastating to I. / 'Langemarck'. SS-Hauptsturmführer Rehman and his adjutant were both wounded, and most of the runners and forward medical personnel at the command post were killed. Battalion command was assumed by 3. Kompanie's SS-Ustuf Georg D'Haese, a decorated former assault engineer, who had just taken his third wound. When the storm of artillery ceased a column of Soviet tanks backed by infantry attacked the hill; German artillery stopped the first wave temporarily, but resumed Soviet artillery fire then allowed the tanks to advance again.

Several positions on the flats defended by SS-Regt 'Danmark' were overrun, as were those of 2./ & 3./ 'Langemarck' on the eastern slopes of Orphanage Hill, most of which soon fell into Soviet hands. However, desperate Flemish counterattacks, culminating in fighting with bayonets and entrenching tools, recovered lost ground. During the fighting on 26 July the commander of 2. Kp, SS-Ustuf van Moll, was killed; SS-Ustuf Swinnen of 1./ 'Langemarck' was wounded, and his replacement, SS-Ustuf Josef van Bockel, would be killed the following day.

Remi Schrijnen's Knight's Cross

The anti-tank guns were silenced one by one. On the battalion's northern flank, eventually only that of SS-Uscha Jef Grootaers was still fireable, although the PaK 40's shield had been partly destroyed, the extractor was damaged, and SS-Strm Remi Schrijnen was the only member of the crew still capable of serving the gun. From his lone position the young Flemish gunner saw Soviet tanks advancing at an angle which gave him clear shots from the side. At short range, he loaded, fired, re-loaded, and kept firing until his ammunition ran out. By then he had destroyed three 'Josef Stalin' IS-2 heavy tanks and four T-34s, and damaged at least two more. Shrijnen suffered splinter wounds from return fire, and was finally knocked unconscious by the explosion caused by his last shot into a Stalin tank at point-blank range. Discovered next to his gun the following day, and given first aid by soldiers from 'Nordland', Schrijnen would survive to be awarded the Knight's Cross for his exemplary conduct.

Orphanage and Grenadier Hills

During the night of 26/27 July positions defended by naval infantry south of 'Langemarck' were overrun, leaving Soviet tanks threatening both the Flemish battalion and SS-Regt 'Norge'. Under cover of darkness a tank-killer squad led by SS-Uscha Illum ventured out into no-man's-land with Panzerfausts, and managed to destroy several of them. At dawn on 27 July another artillery barrage prepared the way for renewed Soviet tank and infantry attacks. Fighting alongside a German penal battalion, 'Langemarck' was eventually forced back westwards onto Grenadier Hill. At about 9.30am a Flemish assault group, reinforced by Latvian and Estonian troops and with artillery support,

A pair of identical twin brothers serving together in the anti-tank 5. Kompanie of 'Langemarck' in January 1944. They are identically dressed in M1940 field caps and the reversible white/ camouflage parkas of the 1943 Waffen-SS *Wintertarnanzug*. (US NARA)

Flemish crew loading a 7.5cm armour-piercing round into a PaK 40 – the type of weapon that Remi Schrijnen of 5./ 'Langemarck' was serving single-handed when he earned his Knight's Cross on 26 July 1944, while defending Orphanage Hill in the *Tannenbergstellung.* (US NARA)

Exhausted squad light machine-gun team of Flemish grenadiers in action in the *Tannenbergstellung*, July 1944. They still wear first-pattern Waffen-SS camouflage smocks and helmet covers. (US NARA)

managed to retake positions on the western crest of Orphanage, but lost about 50 men, and were unable to hold the retaken ground. At the end of the day the Flemish volunteers were entrenched on Grenadier.

On 28 July, as Estonian and Soviet soldiers were still locked in close-quarter fighting on Orphanage, the Corps staff launched another attempt to recapture the feature, under the command of SS-Stubaf Siegfried Scheibe of II. / 'Norge'. The elements committed were his 5. & 6. Kompanie, part of the Estonian SS-Frw Gren-Regt 47, and Kampfgruppe 'Langemarck'. Although they reached the enemy trenches they were driven back by tank reinforcements, and after SS-Stubaf Scheibe was wounded the units withdrew to Grenadier Hill, where pursuing enemy infantry reached the eastern slope. During that day SS-Ustuf D'Haese and other Flemish officers were also wounded.

On 29 July, the fourth day of the battle, Soviet artillery concentrated on both Grenadier Hill and the village of Chundinurk in the front line on the flats to the south, held by part of SS-Regt 'Danmark'. The inevitable assaults followed, by some 100 tanks and up to 6,000 infantry, which overran some positions and simply bypassed others. The fighting was characterized by Red Army tanks ranging along both flanks of all three hills firing directly into bunkers and trenches, which did great damage, particularly on the poorly protected Love Hill. On the low ground a few tanks and assault guns of the 'Nordland' Div's SS-Pz-Abt 11 'Hermann von Salza', led by its commander SS-Ostubaf Paul-Albert Kausch, won time by a desperate armoured counterattack, which left IIISS-Pz-Korps with only a single serviceable PzKw V Panther. On Grenadier Hill, where shelling had destroyed the remaining tree cover, the survivors of II. / 'Norge', elements of the Estonian 20. Waffen-Gren Div and the Flemish Kampfgruppe fought on in small groups, as did a handful of Kreigsmarine infantry. From the eastern slopes of Orphanage Hill indirect fire from Soviet heavy weapons fell indiscriminately on troops of both sides.

On 30 July only about 50 men of Kampfgruppe 'Langemarck' were still fit for combat, and from then on the Estonians would bear most of the burden, fighting courageously on their own soil. That day I. / Waffen-Gren-Regt 45 managed to clear Soviet infantry from Grenadier Hill, and the feature was held against repeated counterattacks. The Red Army's bombardments became weaker over the following days; Grenadier Hill was partly lost once again, but recaptured on 2 August by II. / Waffen-Gren-Regt 46. On 10 August the Soviet High Command finally abandoned the offensive: although hugely outnumbered, particularly in armour and artillery, the European SS volunteer units had won an extraordinary defensive victory.

In mid-September 1944, German forces began withdrawing from Estonia. On 20 September the last 130 survivors of Kampfgruppe 'Langemarck' left the port of Tallinn aboard the transport *Gottland,* and on the 26th they arrived at Swinemünde in Pomerania.

Aftermath

While I. Bataillon had been engaged on the Estonian front, II. / 'Langemarck' had completed its formation at the Knoviz training camp. The Allied liberation of Belgium had prompted a last influx of Flemish refugees into Germany, and on 18 September Himmler had ordered the transformation of the 6. SS-Sturmbrigade into a new Flemish division.

Recovering from his wounds, SS-Hstuf Rehmann returned to command his battalion. Two new companies were formed, led by SS-Ustuf D'Haese (now wearing the Iron Cross 1st Class) and SS-Ustuf Laperre, but shortly afterwards Georg D'Haese was seriously injured in a motoring accident. On 18 October 1944 the new formation, commanded by SS-Ostubaf Schellong, was designated 27. SS-Freiwilligen Panzer-Grenadier-Division 'Langemarck' (flämische Nr.1), and on 30 October the mauled I. / 'Langemarck' was transferred to Scheessel in Lower Saxony to form its cadre. The remaining manpower for the nominal division came from the usual very mixed sources, and its strength would hardly exceed 3,000 men durng its fighting around Stettin, Stargard and Altdamm in February-March 1945.

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PLATE COMMENTARIES

A: POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS

A1*: Banleider, Zwarte Brigade, VNV Dietsche Militie*; Brussels, July 1942

A national rally of the DM in Brussels in July 1942 was attended by some 12,000 members. This colonel-equivalent of the *Vlaamsch Nationaal Verbond* militia's elite brigade holds the banner of a Brabant regiment, with the Flanders lion reversed to golden-yellow on a black ground. The officer's cap badges are a silver vertical runic 'wolf hook', above a silver-wreathed VNV badge: a blue triangle on a white disc, edged orange. The green ZB distinctive colour is displayed as cap piping, shoulder-strap underlay, and first-pattern 'flame' collar patches, though here bearing second-pattern rank insignia of a silver oakleaf **(1a)**. The VNV left-sleeve patch bears the black 'wolf hook' on a yellow shield. On his left breast are a VNV party badge above a silver badge commemorating Joris van Severen, the executed leader of the *Verdinaso* movement, which supplied recruits for the DM from summer 1940.

A2: *Wachtmeester, Germaansche-SS in Vlaanderen*; Brussels, December 1942

This Unterscharführer-equivalent in the Flemish branch of the Allgemeine-SS, photographed during an assassinated officer's funeral, displays cap badges of a diamond-shaped swastika **(2a)** above the SS Totenkopf. The greatcoat has a narrow Allgemeine-SS silver-and-black checkered shoulder strap on the right only; collar patches edged in silver/ black twist cord, blank on his right and with a rank star on his left; and on the left sleeve a diamond-shaped SS-rune patch also edged with alternating cord, above a cuff title lettered *'SS-Vlaanderen'* in pale grey.

A3: *Légionnaire, Jeunesse Légionnaire*; Limburg, summer 1943

The Rexist Party youth branch, formerly the *Serments de la Jeunesse*, was renamed in March 1943 as the *Jeunesse Légionnaire*. This parading teenager wears a green cotton military shirt with a red neckerchief, woollen shorts in Belgian Army mustard-khaki, and white socks rolled down over black shoes. The insignia are shoulder titles bearing in red the name of the district; a left sleeve patch with the emblem of Limburg province **(3a)**; and the JL's left breast patch **(3b)**. His 'camp knife', copied from that of the German Hitlerjugend, is carried in a black scabbard from a braced belt with a Burgundy Cross buckle-plate.

Silver class (of bronze, silver and gold) of the Rexist Party's Honour Badge, also known as the 'Blood Order'; the inscription around the 43mm-diameter ring reads *'Bravoure Honneur Fidelité'* . Members of the *Légion Wallonie* and the later Sturmbrigade and Division 'Wallonien' were photographed wearing examples of at least the first two classes on the left breast pocket; the criteria for award are unknown, but may have included being wounded in action. On 16 October 1944 Himmler authorized its wear on SS uniforms, but the practice predated this order. (Courtesy Rene Chavez Collection)

B: WALLOON VOLUNTEERS, 1941–43

B1: Volunteer, Rexist *Formations de Combat;* Belgium, 1943

All Rexist Party organizations were significantly smaller than their equivalents in Flanders; by 1942-43 the *Formations de Combat,* the Walloon equivalent of the Flemish *Dietsche Militie*, may have numbered only some 1,500 after many members volunteered for the *Légion Wallonie.* Their uniform was a dark blue sidecap and fly-front overalls, with visible buttons on the shoulder straps and pocket flaps only; the universal insignia was a red Burgundy Cross on a black square on the right breast pocket, and a 1943 photo seems to show a senior grade with two silver (?) transverse bars outside numerals or possibly 'F C' on the shoulder straps. The same photo shows the Army-type 'Wallonie' shield on the right sleeve, perhaps identifying men employed by the Wehrmacht. We show our subject reading the newspaper *'National Socialism'.*

B2: Unteroffizier, *Légion Wallonie;* Meseritz, August 1941

This corporal going on parade at the Legion's training camp in Poland carries the unit's first flag, presented by the Rexist *Formations de Combat* on 8 August. Its plain design shows the historical 'ragged cross' of Burgundy in red on a black ground, with silver fringes. The NCO's uniform is entirely that of the German Army, apart from the *'Wallonie'* shield of so-called 'Polish' shape, worn on the left upper sleeve by all ranks.

B3: Schütze Léon Degrelle, Wallonisches Infanterie-Bataillon 373; 25 August 1941

Pictured during the oath-taking ceremony at which the Walloon volunteers swore allegiance to Hitler, Degrelle wears the same uniform as B2 but without the NCO's silver *Tresse* braid around the collar and shoulder straps. For political reasons the Germans offered him an immediate second-lieutenant's commission, but he refused on the grounds of his lack of military experience.

Oberleutnant Degrelle of the *Légion Wallonie* photographed in early 1943, sporting the mountain troops' *Bergmütze* cap and Army *Edelweiss* badge (and the right sleeve badge, hidden at this angle). Also note that the 'lights' on his collar braids are green, rather than infantry white. See under Plate C2 & C3 for this unexplained practice, which some believe predated the unit's withdrawal from the Caucasus in November 1942. Degrelle, and at least some other officers of the 'Wallonien' Division were still wearing *Edelweiss* cap and sleeve badges (the latter apparently of Waffen-SS pattern) in early 1945. (US NARA)

C: WALLONISCHES INF-BTL 373/ *LÉGION WALLONIE*

C1: Schütze; Gromowaja-Balka, February 1942

Like most German troops in winter 1941/42, this Walloon soldier wears improvised snow-camouflage over his inadequate greatcoat and uniform. (A photo of Degrelle carrying an MG34 shows an apparently white knitted 'balaclava' ski-mask with two eye-holes, worn with his greatcoat.) His leather belt and Y-strap equipment is worn over the white garment for ease of access to the cartridge pouches for his 7.92mm Mauser 98k rifle, and a Stielhandgranate 24 stick grenade. The Walloon Legion's stubborn defence of this village on the Donetz front during the Soviet winter counter-offensive cost it some 30 per cent casualties, and earned it 37 Iron Crosses.

C2 & C3: Hauptmann Lucien Lippert, & Schütze; Caucasus, autumn 1942 ?

Lippert, a veteran of the Belgian 14th Artillery in May 1940, led the Walloon Legion from June 1942 until his death in action at the head of SS-Sturmbrigade 'Wallonien' in February 1944. He (and his soldier) are reconstructed here during the Legion's attachment to 97. Jäger-Division. Photos in spring 1943 show Walloon officers displaying the light green *Waffenfarbe* of the mountain (Gebirgs) troops, and the use in this unit of the short-peaked *Bergmütze* cap and *Edelweiss* cap and sleeve badges. The exact dates of adoption are uncertain, but some believe that they predated the Legion's withdrawal from the Caucasus. This practice is puzzling, since the Walloons were not attached to a mountain formation. The Jäger units had their own distinctive cap-side and right-sleeve badges featuring a spray of three oakleaves, but these were authorized only on 2 August and 2 October 1942 respectively (so not long before the Legion's withdrawal from this front in November), while the mountain troops' distinctions predated World War II. The soldier also wears cleated *Bergschuhe* climbing boots and ankle puttees, and his combat experience is shown by his Infantry Assault Badge and the ribbon of the Winter 1941/42 medal.

D: STURMBRIGADE & DIVISION 'WALLONIEN', 1944–45

D1: SS-Panzer-Jäger, 5. SS-Sturmbrigade 'Wallonien'; Ukraine, January 1944

Pictured on the eve of the Korsun Pocket fighting when the brigade was attached to the 'Wiking' Div, this gunner serves with its anti-tank platoon, which was equipped with half-tracks to tow the guns and carry the crews. He wears the field-grey 'special uniform' for AFV crews, issued to some Panzer-Grenadiers as well as to assault-gun and tank-destroyer crews. He displays the Waffen-SS eagle and the old Army-style *'Wallonie'* shield on his left sleeve, and the rose-pink *Waffenfarbe* piping of tank and anti-tank troops on his shoulder straps.

D2: SS-Untersturmführer Léon Gillis, 28. SS-Freiwilligen Grenadier-Division 'Wallonien'; Stargard, January-February 1945

This officer, shown fighting in Pomerania, had been awarded the Knight's Cross for an action in southern Estonia the previous August, when his conduct in command of anti-tank guns on the highway south of Tartu had saved the day. Here he wears a privately-acquired sheepskin jacket, and carries an example of the new Sturmgewehr 44 assault rifle. The remnant of the division would fall back over the Oder to Schwedt at the end of March, and, like 'Langemarck', would receive some resupply there.

D3: SS-Unterscharführer, 28. SS-Frw Gen-Div 'Wallonien'; Strebelow, early 1945

This junior NCO wears the M1943 'universal field cap', and the excellent grey, fur-lined pullover parka issued by the Waffen-SS in winter 1942/43 (the 1944 issue unbuttoned down the front). A photo shows this forbidden use of the sleeve shield on the parka. He has also acquired one of several types of felt and leather winter boots.

E: FLEMISH VOLUNTEERS, 1942

1: NCO, SS-Frw Legion Flandern; Volkhov front, June 1942

The MP40 was the standard weapon throughout the war for a squad or platoon leader, who also often carried short binoculars and a mapcase. Depending on casualties and availability, platoons in combat might be led by any of the three grades of Scharführer (sergeant). In the great heat of summer, this soldier wears his first-pattern Waffen-SS camouflage smock next to his skin. This example is in what postwar collectors call 'palm pattern'; this showed more elongated streaks of the darkest shade than the 'planetree' or 'oakleaf'

patterns, and was not used for helmet-covers. Though not illustrated here, in summertime it was also common for troops to wear mosquito-net hoods over the helmet and face.

E2: Flemish nurse, Deutsches Rotes Kreuz; Leningrad front, August 1942

A number of Flemish nurses volunteered to serve with the Legion; like their German counterparts, they wore the uniforms of the German Red Cross, with a starched white cap and collar and a Red Cross brooch at the throat. This is the white-and-grey pinstripe variation of ward dress which is seen in many photos, worn with a bib-fronted apron. Obscured here on her left sleeve is a DR Red Cross brassard; her nationality is indicated by a German-made right-sleeve shield of the Flemish lion in black on yellow.

E3: SS-Unterscharführer, SS-Frw Legion Flandern; Leningrad front, August 1942

The service/ walking-out uniform of this slightly wounded SS-Uscha visiting a rear-area Lazarett varies from that of other Waffen-SS units only in the Flemish lion shield worn on his left forearm, and the cuff title *'Frw. Legion Flandern'*. Above his left breast pocket he displays the ribbon bar of the Iron Cross 2nd Class; below this are the badge commemorating Reimond Tollenaere **(3a)**, former leader of the VNV's *Zwarte Brigad*e militia, and a black Wound Badge.

Richard (Remi) Schrijnen's tank-killing feats on 26 July 1944 earned him the Iron Cross 1st Class and the Wound Badge in gold on 3 August, and mention in the Wehrmacht Bulletin two days later. On 13 August, SS-Ogruf Steiner recommended him for the Honour Roll Badge; on the 28th, at the request of SS-Ostubaf Schellong, this was upgraded to the Knight's Cross, which was confirmed on 21 September. See under Plate G3 for further details. (Author's collection)

F: STURMBRIGADE & DIVISION 'LANGEMARCK', 1944–45

F1: SS-Untersturmführer, 6. Sturmbrigade 'Langemarck'; Jampol, February 1944

This second lieutenant on the Ukrainian front still wears the officers' silver-piped version of the Waffen-SS M1940 Luftwaffe-style field cap , and has added his insignia to an enlisted ranks' tunic, worn with rankers' trousers and marching boots. The reversed sheepskin (or possibly rabbit-fur) jerkin, worn for warmth and freedom of movement, is privately acquired. He carries minimal field equipment, a holstered Walther pistol and an MP40.

F2: SS-Grenadier, 6. Sturmbrigade 'Langemarck'; Staro-Konstantinov, March 1944

(The German designation 'grenadier' for infantry units from November 1942 was purely honorific, and had no practical meaning.) This survivor of the retreat from Jampol wears a regulation issue grey 'toque' (a knitted woollen neck tube that could be pulled up as a quasi-balaclava) over his old M1940 field cap. The parka of his 1943 padded, reversible winter/ autumn *Wintertarnanzug* is worn autumn-side out, showing an 'oakleaf' camouflage pattern. The grey padded trousers are of earlier 1942 issue.

F3: SS-Sturmann, 27. SS-Frw Grenadier-Div 'Langemarck'; Pyritz, February 1945

Fighting in Pomerania, the Flemish formation would be reduced to little more than a battalion-strength battlegroup before being forced back over the Oder river on 30 March. It was then re-equipped particularly for tank-hunting, and this senior private foreshadows that in his armament: the 8.8cm *'Panzershreck'* projector for a hollow-charge rocket (here the RPzB 54 model with added face-shield). As in 'Wallonien', the national shield badge is seen in photos worn indiscriminately either on the upper or lower left sleeve.

F4: Barracks sign, Sturmbrigade 'Langemarck', 1944

G: PERSONALITIES

G1: SS-Sturmbannführer Konrad Schellong, 6. Sturmbrigade 'Langemarck'; Bohemia, May 1944

The brigade commander wore a light field-grey service cap and tunic contrasting with darker grey breeches, the tunic with Army-style dark green collar facing. His collar patches show the 'Trifos' on his right and his rank on the left; his interwoven shoulder straps of field rank are set on double underlay, of infantry white over SS black. On the right sleeve he displays the 'Alter Kampfer' chevron showing NSDAP membership before January 1933, and on the left sleeve the SS eagle, Flemish lion patch and *'Langemarck'* cuff title. On his left breast are a silver Close Combat Clasp, above the Iron Cross 1st Class, Infantry Assault Badge, silver Wound Badge for three or four wounds, and the runes badge indicating individual full membership of the SS (worn in the absence of the SS-runes collar patch). On his right pocket is the German Cross in Gold awarded on 29 March 1944. Schellong survived the war; he emigrated to the USA in 1957, but was deported in 1983 for failure to disclose his early service at concentration camps, and died in 1992.

G2: SS-Sturmbannführer Léon Degrelle, 5. Sturmbrigade 'Wallonien'; Estonia, August 1944

Several photos show Degrelle leading the battalion from his brigade with Kampfgruppe Wagner in the Tartu line. He wears a silver-piped officers' M1940 field cap, and the non-reversible twill tunic and trousers of the *getarnter Drillichanzug* introduced in March 1944, in the camouflage now termed 'pea pattern' (unusually with this uniform, he also wears riding boots). At his throat is the Knight's Cross awarded for his part in the Korsun Pocket breakout in February 1944. On his left sleeve are the SS eagle, above the horizontal green-on-black rank insignia issued for use on camouflage clothing – for SS-Stubaf, two pairs of oakleaves above one bar. Armed with an MP40, he carries triple magazine pouches on the right side of his SS officers' service belt, and a holstered P38 on the left. Famously, Degrelle flew from Germany to Spain in May 1945. Condemned to death for treason in his absence, he was not extradited; he lived in Spain, openly displaying the trappings of his Waffen-SS service, until his death in 1994.

G3: SS-Unterscharführer Remi Schrijnen, 6. Sturmbrigade 'Langemarck'; Pomerania, September 1944

Portrait photos show Schrijnen in late September, after the brigade's withdrawal from Estonia and his promotion and decoration. For his heroism in the *Tannenbergstellung* on 26 July he was promoted directly from SS-Sturmann to SS-Unterscharführer, and awarded both the Iron Cross 1st Class and the Knight's Cross (the former was necessary before the latter could be awarded). He also displays the gold Wound Badge for five wounds, the commemorative Tollenaere badge (see E3 & E4), the Infantry Assault Badge (he had originally served as an infantry runner), and the pink shoulder-strap piping of the anti-tank branch.

Schrijnen survived the war, but was imprisoned in Belgium in 1945-50, and again (on dubious grounds) in 1953-55; he later took German nationality, and died in Germany in 2006.

H: FLAGS & INSIGNIA

H1: Flag of SS-Freiwilligen Legion Flandern.

H2: 4e Compagnie flag of Légion Wallonie & Sturmbrigade 'Wallonien'; all company flags had this common design, differing only in the ordinal number. The design is attributed to John Hagemans of the Rexist *Jeunesse Légionnaire*, who brought the first four to the front with a contingent of young reinforcements in spring 1942.

H3: Cuff title of SS-Freiwilligen Legion Flandern.

H4: Cuff title of SS-Freiwilligen Sturmbrigade 'Langemarck'.

H5: Cuff title of SS-Sturmbrigade 'Wallonien'.

H6: 'Trifos' right collar-patch insignia of Frw Sturmbrigade 'Langemarck', inherited from the SS-Standarte 'Nordwest'.

H7: One of several designs of Flemish-made national sleeve shield worn by SS-Frw Legion Flandern, varying slightly in details; these were sometimes retained by veterans serving in SS-Frw Sturmbrigade 'Langemarck'.

H8: German-made final version of Flemish national sleeve shield, worn by SS-Frw Sturmbrigade 'Langemarck'.

H9: First 'Polish-shape' national sleeve shield worn on Army uniform by *Légion Wallonie,* sometimes retained by veterans in SS-Sturmbrigade 'Wallonien'.

The second (SS or 'French-shape') pattern of the 'Wallonie' sleeve shield. (Author's drawing)
Variant 'Langemarck' cuff titles, manufactured in (top to bottom) BeVo machine-weave; machine-embroidered rayon; and machine-woven aluminium thread.

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TITLE PAGE
Brussels, April 1944: Léon Degrelle (accompanied by his young children) takes the salute of SS Assault Brigade 'Wallonien' during the parade marking its return from the Korsun Pocket. The SdKfz 251 halftrack, numbered '001', was borrowed for the occasion from 12. SS-Pz-Div 'Hitlerjugend'. (US NARA)

Author's note & acknowledgements

To retrace the operational history of these units, I have referred mainly to archival documents and wartime publications, but also to published works about Belgian volunteers in the Waffen-SS.
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Artist's note

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Editor's note

To avoid a mass of italics in this text, only French and Flemish titles of organizations and units are *italicized*, while German equivalents are in Roman type. In Osprey house style, honour-titles of SS units and formations are printed between quote-marks, e.g. 2. SS-Pz-Div 'Das Reich'.
Since the sources used are in both German and Russian, inconsistent spelling of placenames originally in the Cyrillic alphabet (e.g., transpositions of 'j ', 'y' and ' ï ', and of 'w' and 'v') is practically unavoidable.